THE MACHINE TO KILL

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THE MACHINE TO KILL

By Gaston Leroux

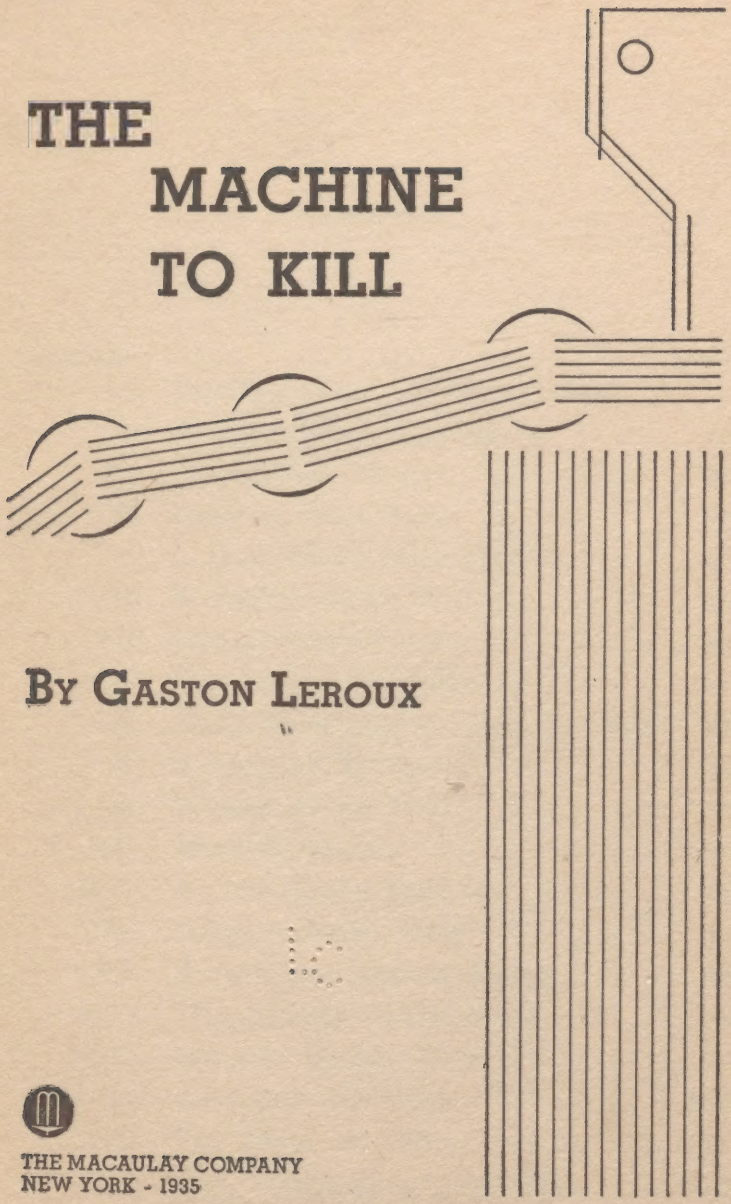
THIS famous writer of mystery tales has spun another story which is a smooth blend of the credible and the fantastic. Jacques Cotentin is a brilliant, imaginative young surgeon; his greatest triumph is his creation of a living automaton. This creature, mechanically perfect through the inventive genius of his uncle, the watchmaker of Saint Louis Isle, physically beautiful through the artistry of Mlle. Christine, his pretty fiancee, lacks only a brain to co-ordinate and direct its chemical processes. The timely execution of Benedict Masson, "the Bluebeard of Corbillieres," fills his need, and the fiendish brain of the scarcely-lamented bookbinder is once again alive. . . . . .

All this we learn through the chatter of gossiping neighbors as Mr. Leroux subtly creates an atmosphere of steadily mounting horror. The denouement is their realization that this uncanny, yet entirely plausible creature is at large, to terrify and perhaps to kill, large numbers of the innocent Parisian populace. . . . . .

The Police and the Press are both called upon, and are both apparently helpless; although the latter succeeds in arousing thousands of people to a realization of their probable fate with immense headlines about the "Gory Puppet." . . . . . .

Incident piles upon incident, all of it recounted with a careful restraint and an adult sense of humour that lightly pokes fun at the characters, the reader, and even the author.

THE MACHINE TO KILL



By Gaston Leroux

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Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Bluebeard of Corbillieres . .	9
II.	A Fool's Smile	16
III.	Suppressing Death	21
IV.	Dripping with Blood	25
V.	A Dead Man's Handwriting . . .	33
VI.	A Twelve-Hour Nap	39
VII.	Like a Grecian God	45
VIII.	The Missing Madonna	51
IX.	What Happened to M. Lavieuville	55
X.	A Father's Promise	60
XI.	Stabbed to the Hilt	66
XII.	News of Terror	72
XIII.	At the Green Tree Inn	78
XIV.	Their Supreme Hope	84
XV.	Within the Sinister Abode . . .	89
XVI.	The Agonies of Christine . . .	92
XVII.	Benedict Masson Lives	99
XVIII.	Remaking the Dead	104
XIX.	The Proof of Guilt	111
XX.	The Threshold of Oblivion . . .	119

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXI.	The Gory Puppet	123
XXII.	The Voice of Science	127
XXIII.	A Living Machine	131
XXIV.	Assassinating the World	141
XXV.	Another Victim	144
XXVI.	The Peril of Death	148
XXVII.	A City in Hysteria	155
XXVIII.	On the Trail	161
XXIX.	Return of the Marchioness	168
XXX.	In the Snows	174
XXXI.	Freeing the Soul	181
XXXII.	Was Benedict Innocent?	184
XXXIII.	Shivering with Fear	190
XXXIV.	A Terrifying Turn	196
XXXV.	Christine Is Captured!	203
XXXVI.	The Kiss That Killed	207
XXXVII.	A Memorable Séance	212
XXXVIII.	Lebouc's Master Stroke	219
XXXIX.	The Catastrophe	224
XL.	A Greater Miracle	230
XLI.	On the Stroke of Midnight	235
XLII.	The Phantom Appears	240
XLIII.	Word from Christine	246
XLIV.	Passing of the Puppet	250

THE MACHINE TO KILL

CHAPTER I

The Bluebeard of Corbillieres

HERE is a quiet little street that has been drowsing for two centuries, where the most important event of the day for certain old fossils is a couple of bewildered tourists who pass by, an unexpected call at a neighbor's house, the rare occurrence of a young girl going out in new clothes or the repeated visits of the watchmaker's daughter to the master bookbinder's home.

Then, suddenly, the neighborhood learns that the master bookbinder has been arrested for having heated his stove with a half dozen poor young women who went up in smoke; and that he was caught at his diabolical work by this same watchmaker's daughter; and that it was owing to a miracle that she herself escaped the fate that was awaiting her.

One can easily imagine the consternation that this frightful tragedy brought into the habits and customs of this corner of the Saint Louis Isle and particularly in the social set of Mlle. Barescat, haberdasher. From the Bethune Quays to Estacade they were living "under the reign of terror," as Mme. Langlois, the ex-charwoman for that dreadful Benedict Masson, said.

The locksmiths on the Saint Louis Isle had done a roaring trade during the months which elapsed between the arrest and the execution of Benedict Masson. Never had there

been so many locks on the doors, and never had the doors been so securely shut at night. For fear of what? That Benedict Masson should escape? Perhaps—but there was also something else.

No one ever went to the watchmaker's house since the rumor had got about that here, also, was damned mystery; that was M. Birouste's, the herborist's expression: "A damned mystery that the bookbinder's trial had in no way enlightened."

Some spoke in low voices of a "sequestrator"; others, such as M. Birouste, were positive that it was a question of a very exceptional patient, whom the surgeon—with the assistance of the watchmaker and his daughter—was treating in a manner no less exceptional; "and," added M. Birouste, "if they keep such a strict guard over him, it is probably because he is dangerous. I can only tell you one thing; and that is that the surgeon is working on his skull. For the safety of the neighborhood, let us hope that he does not escape."

As one could see, M. Birouste's words were not at all reassuring at this moment, when the island really had no need for any one to bring its people new subjects of anxiety. However, Benedict Masson's execution at Merlun had calmed their nerves considerably. In the back parlors of certain shops, the evening reunions had gradually been revived; and that is how it is that we are able to be present at "the camomile tea" that Mlle. Barescat served on Wednesdays and Saturdays when the clock of the Church of Saint Louis struck nine.

This was not her most brilliant "camomile." There were only three guests to do honor to it; but what took place at this gathering, and the immediate and incalculable im-

portance of its effect, made it certainly a camomile that would go down in history. M. Birouste, who was Mlle. Barescat's next door neighbor, and, on account of his being a herborist, was able to get her camomile at a reduced price, came first.

He was soon followed by Mme. Camus, a lady who rented chairs at the church, and who was a protégé of M. Lavieuville, the church warden, a person of importance; but on this particular evening the principal attraction at this little gathering was Mme. Langlois herself.

Mme. Langlois, as we have been able to infer already, although a charwoman, was not an ordinary, everyday sort of a charwoman. She had once held a position. She had been a saleslady; and then had married and had established a little millinery business; then had promptly gone into bankruptcy, although quite honestly.

Since the death of her husband, she had worked calculatingly, with her head held high, to satisfy her last creditor, and regain her lost honor. This female, Cæsar Birotteau, had remained voluntarily in the neighborhood which had witnessed her discomfiture, so that it might also witness her industrious efforts and, if it pleased God, her triumph.

Before this terrible affair of Benedict Masson, whose modest furniture she had been dusting for a long time, she had the respect of the entire community. To consolidate herself in it, and to prove that she was the first one to rejoice in the supreme punishment which awaited the monster, she had had the courage—she, a weak woman—to go to Merlun, correctly informed as to the day of execution by M. Lavieuville, at whose house she labored two hours a day, doing rough work, and who was on intimate terms with a big gun in the magistracy.

There, at Merlun, she had been present—in the first row, so she had declared—at the execution of the Bluebeard of Corbillieres.

The heroism that she had displayed on the occasion and the account, afterward, that she had afforded of this impatiently anticipated and important event had rendered her virtually in the vogue, and this was attested to by the fact that Mlle. Barescat had begged her this evening to come to her camomile.

Naturally, every one made a fuss over her; and there was not one of them, from the cat to the haberdasher lady, who did not greet her, individually, with the most agreeable purr.

It was now half past nine, and approaching the historical moment.

"My faith, I don't know whether we shall have the pleasure of 'possessing' M. Tannegrin this evening," remarked Mlle. Barescat, "but we shall not wait long for him. Serves them right—those who are late! Who wants my camomile?"

"It's a pity," said the lady who rented the church chairs, "for he is always so funny; but, with the cold weather that we are having, he must be suffering from his rheumatism."

After these remarks on M. Tannegrin, ex-sheriff's clerk, official attendant to the justice of the peace, and monologist at desserts, they began to drink of Mlle. Barescat's camomile, a concoction which she knew to perfection how to flavor with just a suspicion of anisette, and which, according to the chair renter, made an exquisite beverage.

"Anisette. I've always liked it—I have," observed Mme. Langlois, who up till now had said nothing. She was fully

aware of her importance, and knew how eagerly they were looking forward to her words. So she held herself in reserve. They would have to beg her to relate the details of the execution at Merlun, like the daughter of the gentry in days gone by when she was asked to play the piano.

After every one had implored her, she at length unbent. She described this heroic outing in all its details; she forgot nothing.

M. Lavieuville had given her a little note, which she had taken at once to the attorney general, whom she "found still in bed"; and he had referred her to the captain of the gendarmes; and the latter had given her a seat in the first row; and he had caught her in his arms at the moment when the knife fell—for by then she was "more dead than alive."

"Him, too?"

"What do you mean—him, too?"

"Well—he was more dead than alive, too?"

"Do you really think so—a captain in the gendarmerie?"

"No. No. I was talking of the murderer."

"Well—I didn't know what you meant. With you, one never knows where they are."

"Yes. He is always so lordly with his dry wit—that Birouste," commented Mme. Camus, who did not like him.

"And you had the courage to look right in his face?" asked Mlle. Barescat. "Be still, Mysti. I don't know what ails the cat this evening. He won't stay in one place, and he's as stiff as horse hair."

"Yes, Mlle. Barescat," continued Mme. Langlois, "I looked him full in the face—our eyes met. He recognized me; and we said some things to each other at that moment that he won't brag about, believe me."

"Well—he won't have the chance," contributed M. Birouste.

"Oh—you! One can't talk with you," moaned Mme. Camus. "Don't tease her so; we shall never know anything if you keep interrupting all the time."

"Yes—and during that time M. Birouste was comfortably in bed," remarked Mme. Langlois with an arid smile.

"Did you get any details of his last moments, the awakening in the prison, for instance?" *mademoiselle* put in hastily. She felt that it was her duty to prevent a dispute from taking place at her tea.

"Dear *mademoiselle,* don't speak of it. When they woke him up—for he slept like a dormouse—he said: 'Well, it's about time!' And then he talked about what the law was doing; and what the attorney general had taken for his cold."

"Did the attorney general have a cold?" inquired M. Birouste.

"Oh—you," cried Mme. Camus indignantly. "You are more cynical than the other. These fellows ought to be executed twice."

"Thank you," Birouste acknowledged.

"Oh, I wasn't speaking of you. You seem to think that one only thinks of you. I mean fellows like Benedict Masson."

"Did you read the verses that he left behind for that Christine?" interrupted Mlle. Barescat.

"Yes. I read them in the newspaper," replied Mme. Langlois, "but I've got some verses, too, written in his own hand."

"No!"

"Yes. See! I brought them with me. You can under-

stand: it's a souvenir—such a case. They'd pay a lot for them. I sneaked them from his blotter the last time I tidied up his desk. It's more about that Christine. Read them."

"How very strange," murmured Mlle. Barescat and Mme. Camus at the same time.

A Fool's Smile

THEREUPON, Mme. Langlois took a paper out of her bag and unfolded it. The lines were uneven—a proof that it was verse; and the writing was extraordinary—immense letters, which seemed to be all jumbled together in a multicolored chaos, for some were green, others red, blue, or yellow; and all around were violet paraphrases in streaks. The manuscript of Barbey d'Aurevilly, compared with this, was like the work of a very good child. They read it.

"I have gathered up my sins (the guests: "That's something he didn't lack"), and I have placed them before me; and I have wept ("He might well do so").

"The caravan is starting for heaven; I have shouldered my sins, and am following it. But an angel has appeared to me, and says to me: 'Where goest thou so pitifully? You will never reach Paradise with this burden that you are carrying.' And the Angel Christine helped me carry this horrible burden!"

"Well—of all things!" ejaculated Mlle. Barescat. "There's nothing more to say. She helped him to go to Paradise. That we know!"

"And this writing! I shall see it before my eyes for the rest of my days," said Mme. Camus.

"The writing of a murderer!" declared M. Birouste, who had now put on his glasses.

"And one more word," added Mme. Langlois, holding on carefully to her precious bit of paper. "Did you know that the School of Medicine has claimed his head?"

"Yes. They said that in the newspapers!"

"But you don't know who carried it away?"

"No."

"A fellow that's not quite a stranger in the neighborhood. Oh, I recognized him at once. He stood planted there at the cemetery gate as though he was even then afraid that they were going to sneak away his belongings."

"I guess it's Baptiste," cried M. Birouste.

"Who's Baptiste?" queried Mlle. Barescat.

"The fellow at the laboratory that I told you about. Jacques Cotentin's helper."

"Oh, I remember," *mademoiselle* responded. "That repulsive looking creature who always had a big box under his arm when he came of an evening to the watchmaker's?"

"Sure."

"Well, I'm going to tell you," continued Mlle. Barescat, "the last time that I saw him it was on the same day that Benedict was executed. It might have been half past nine —perhaps a little more. An automobile stopped in front of the watchmaker's door—you can imagine if I wouldn't remember that—an automobile doesn't stop in front of Norbert's door every day—and that man got out of it.

"The machine went away at once. The watchmaker's door was opened, and that Christine's sawbones, who seemed to be waiting for this fellow, Baptiste, took the box that he was carrying away from him at once. The door was shut again. Let me see! And it was from that day that the

shutters have not been taken down from the shop. It's like a tomb now—that house is."

"Yes," broke in the solemn voice of M. Birouste, "the mystery deepens."

There was a silence. Then Mlle. Barescat said:

"And you, M. Birouste, what do you think of all that?"

"I do not think," declared Birouste gravely. "I am reflecting."

"Well—are you speaking seriously; yes or no?"

"Very seriously. I cannot think because I am reflecting."

"Well, then, what's your idea, Mme. Langlois?" asked Mme. Camus. "M. Birouste keeps on making fun of us."

"You are quite sure, Mlle. Barescat," inquired Mme. Langlois, "that this took place the same morning as the execution?"

"As sure as that I am looking at you now."

"And that Baptiste had the box under his arm?"

"I've told you so."

"Down there at Merlun also he had his box under his arm."

"Then he must have brought the head to the surgeon," cried Mme. Camus.

"One never knows with surgeons," Mme. Langlois stated peremptorily. "I used to do the cleaning for an interne at the Pitie Hospital—well, he had nothing but skulls on his desk—he used them for paperweights—real skulls! Fine thing to be a surgeon, I should say. Such sacrilege ought to be forbidden."

"You talk like children," then spoke up M. Birouste; and all three became quiet, for by the tone in which he had said that, they realized that M. Birouste was not joking

any longer, and that he was speaking like a man that had something to say; and this is what he said:

"Science makes nothing but these sacrileges."

We have no wish to slander any one by stating in advance that M. Birouste was narrow-minded. We are speaking merely of this particular herborist, for we know herborists who have remarkable minds; but Birouste had a small mind. More than a grocer, but less than a pharmacist, he held a position which came between the two realms. For him were the *cassia senna*, the rhubarb and the jalap, the white broth and the rose de Provins, the chickweed for the little birds, and the mustard seed.

That is already a good deal for a small-minded person, but it was not enough for M. Birouste. Under pretension that he knew the laws which governed the conservation of plants, he was not far off from pretending that he knew all those which interpreted nature.

In any case, one could make no allusion in his presence to science, its miracles, what it reserves for us in the near future, without seeing him pull himself up as did M. Prudhomme in days gone by, whenever it was a question of the National Guard, or the country's big institutions, that offered the occasion for him to "have his day." Like Prudhomme, he said: "Nothing that one does in our days astonishes me."

We have also seen that neither did anything astonish Jacques Cotentin, who was a great mind. Which means to say that in the greatest problems, the most redoubtable, which make the average intelligences turn despairingly away, the great and the small minds join. Yet, with a slight

difference; where the great mind will show some anxiety, a small mind will declare with assurance. Conclusion, all the same. Never smile at what a fool or a genius says; they are sometimes both right, while sensible people are often wrong.

CHAPTER III

Suppressing Death

Mlle. Barescat, Mme. Camus and Mme. Langlois were, without doubt, imbued with the first truths, for they were far from smiling. Mounted on his battle horse—Science—the hero of the marshmallow, the guardian angel of the borage and the rosemary, passed his audience in review. As a matter of fact, he despised this audience deeply, as we have been able to see at certain less humorous repartees; he had little respect for the sex to which he owed his mother. At last, the ladies were attentive. He looked at them severely.

"Don't ever speak lightly of scientific men. You put me on edge when I hear you talk of Jacques Cotentin as you would of an ordinary sawbones. Jacques Cotentin, ladies, is a great savant. Let me tell you that if you don't happen to know it; he has published articles which you would not understand, but which have made me reflect.

"And, besides, I know that the School of Medicine has an eye on him; and they hope from his experiments to have one of those miracles that dates humanity. Which? I cannot say. But this strange sick person who is in his house, whom Mme. Langlois tells us is called Gabriel—has he any thing to do with this miracle? It is quite possible. There are others who know.

"I have a nephew, young Celestin, who, as you know,

began working with me, but who is now studying medicine. He attends the practical experiments at the school. He knows Baptiste, and has heard him spoken of down there as a valuable and very mysterious aid, whose duty it is to fetch pieces of anatomy which certain professors, under very exceptional conditions, have handed over to Jacques Cotentin.

"These pieces of anatomy, still vibrating with life, enable the young surgeon, undoubtedly, to attempt experiments in *anima vili* in relation to the theories, which, in his remarkable article now appearing in the *New Review of Anatomy and Human Physiology,* he has merely attacked. These theories put the question: 'Where does life end? Where does death begin?' And you well know that with his possible restoration of the useful energy in living beings, we can look to the moment when we can suppress death."

"Suppress death!" burst out Mlle. Barescat in a voice full of hope.

"Oh, we've not come to that, yet," responded M. Birouste, his words falling like a cold douche.

"Unfortunately," sighed the other ladies.

"But who knows," continued M. Birouste, with the air of one inspired; "we are not far off, perhaps. What are we doing to-day if not suppressing death in almost all parts of the human body—surgery; with its grafting of organs and flesh—doesn't that almost remake the individual? This last war—alas—has given the opportunity to make over the whole face. Mechanism is blended with it; and an artificial locomotion has come to add its miracle to that of surgery. Something unheard of! They have been able to revive a dead heart!"

"How's that? How's that? Oh, M. Birouste, you're going a bit too far," cried Mlle. Barescat, gasping—she often had suffocation spells, and was convinced that her heart would be the cause of her death.

"Not at all, *mademoiselle*. In the most simple way in the world they opened a little shutter in the ribs."

"Great heavens! You call that simple! You—"

"And through this shutter the surgeon performed some rhythmical pressure which brought the suspended circulation into action; that is to say, he brought the dead to life."

"Oh, good heavens! It's like Lazarus," sighed Mme. Camus, whom this conversation completely befuddled.

"They've done even more."

"Oh, it's not possible."

"*Carol*. You've heard speak of *Carol?*"

"Yes—yes, *Carol*. The papers spoke about him."

"One of those fellows that the Americans created the Rockefeller Institute for. Well—he preserved a living heart in a bottle—perfect! He soaked it in a certain serum known to him, and the heart can live forever."

"And the heart can live forever!"

"Forever! He did the same thing with a bit of brain. He'd be able to do it with a whole brain—he would!"

"It's unbelievable. But then," questioned Mlle. Barescat, "this Jacques Cotentin—is he that sort of savant?"

"Exactly. Then, after I read about him all I've told you and all I haven't told you, because, I repeat, there are things that you wouldn't understand—I tell you that one of these days he'll outstrip all the Carols and all the Rockefellers in the world!"

"You don't say so! And do you think he is experimenting with this Gabriel?"

"Mlle. Barescat, I'm not in the secret of the gods—by that I mean the savants who are the gods of the day. I have merely offered hypotheses. Scientific men can only see hypotheses."

"Their Gabriel, perhaps, after all, is only one who was battered in the war, and they are patching him up again," ventured Mlle. Barescat. "Have a little more camomile, Mme. Camus?"

"You're too kind, Mlle. Barescat."

"He is very handsome, is Gabriel," observed Mme. Langlois.

"I should like to see him close to," declared Mlle. Barescat.

CHAPTER IV

Dripping with Blood

At this moment, Mme. Camus got up. "I can hear footsteps in the street. I bet it is M. Tannegrin," she volunteered, going toward the door. "It's not too soon for somebody to make us laugh a bit. All this talk gives me the creeps."

"Listen to the wind—how it whistles; and it was beginning to snow when I arrived. M. Tannegrin would never come in this weather," Mme. Langlois declared.

Yet, the footsteps were quickly coming nearer, and two knocks were then heard on the door.

"I know his way of knocking," said Mme. Camus. "It is M. Tannegrin."

"Don't open without making sure," cried Mlle. Barescat.

But Mme. Camus had already pulled the bolt, and opened the door. At first, it was a whirl of wind and snow which rushed into the shop; and then—let us relate the testimony which Mlle. Barescat's guests and the mistress of the house, herself, had to make officially before the authorities of the sensational event which came into this shop as though carried by the tempest.

Let us say at once that this event was a "kidnaping"—and what a kidnaping!

First spoke Mme. Langlois:

"I'll tell you all, M. Commissioner. One must never make a vow or a wish, because it is just like in the fable; it can jump up and hit you in the face! Mlle. Barescat, who had invited us to her camomile had scarcely said the words: 'I should like to see Gabriel close to,' than there he was, entering like a demon of the tempest, all covered with blood, and carrying Mlle. Norbert, the watchmaker's daughter, fainting in his arms, as though she did not weigh more than a lace fichu—and she also had blood dripping from her face. We all gave a shriek, as you can well imagine—a shriek of horror! I cried out: 'It's him! It's Gabriel!'

"Oh, Lord! I lived a hundred years then. We were like statues of terror before such an invasion. The snow, the blood, and this man who was threatening us with his revolver. The first time that I saw this man, at the watchmaker's house, he seemed to me handsome; but now I could not say that; I could see only his eyes, which were awful! The eyes of a murderer.

"Yes—you'll protect me? I have faith? I have great faith in the justice of my country! Oh—yes! For a murderer's eyes, they were some eyes! When he looked at me I thought I was being murdered! I have lived a hundred years. I have already said that. I repeat it! You must excuse me. Oh, my poor head!

"What did he do? He began by shutting the door behind him, kicking it with his heel. My! It was enough to break it—then he slipped the bolt. Oh—oh! I lived a hundred years! Then, M. Birouste, the herborist, who had run behind the counter, shouted out: 'Hands up! Do like me!' Then, we all put up our hands like they do in the

moving pictures. And Mlle. Barescat's cat scampered off with a terrific leap; and nobody has seen him since.

"As to that Gabriel, he didn't say anything. But, after he'd listened at the door, he laid Christine out on the counter her full length. And then he began to search in his pocket for a handkerchief to wipe away the blood which kept on flowing from the young lady's forehead. But he didn't find any handkerchief, and then—oh, M. Commissioner—Mlle. Barescat's shop! That shop! I lived a hundred years!"

In order to know what Gabriel did to the shop, let us get Mlle. Barescat to tell herself. If her story is a little unconnected, don't expect too much from an old woman, who since having this historical hour, has lost a little of the keenness of her faculties; seeks for a word; falls sometimes into a profound prostration, to come suddenly out of it as though she had been touched with an electric wire; throws her head back so swiftly, so spasmodically, that the ribbon rosettes of her old-fashioned cap seemed to dance on her false hair like an epileptic's shimmy.

"Oh, M. Commissioner—and all for a handkerchief! For that's what he was looking for—a handkerchief! If he had asked me for it! But he didn't say a word! All the same, when I saw him searching through my bureaus—he turned over my shelves—I wanted to interfere—why not, M. Commissioner—I am very pleased to see you. How do you do? Eh—what? You will protect us, M. Commissioner—you will protect us—otherwise, as Mme. Langlois said, there is no justice. And you are just M. Commissioner.

"I am a poor old spinster, very peace-loving, who never

wanted to get married, in spite of the opportunities; and that such a thing should happen to me! Ask all these ladies who have come to Mlle. Barescat's camomile for twenty years. Yes, M. Commissioner, I am at your service. I'm yours!

"You are a just man! Yes! Yes! I'm coming to it. When I saw that he was searching through my bureau drawers—and how—I wanted to interfere; but at the first move that I made, M. Birouste, the herborist, called out to me: 'Hands up!' and he even, with all due respect to you, M. Commissioner, and for which I ask the Almighty's pardon for him, swore like a street porter.

"It appears that Gabriel would not have failed to shoot us with his revolver if we had not stayed there with our hands up, as I tell you, like you see at the moving pictures. Yes—but you are a just man. You will protect an old spinster who—yes, yes, I'm coming to it—and still never a word. If he had spoken, we could have had an understanding. But, perhaps, he did not want us to recognize his voice.

"And then—he was dressed up like the time of the revolution, in a long cloak, a belt with a buckle, again like you'd see in the moving pictures—Mme. Langlois was right! But in life, M. Commissioner, oh, in life—there are things that happen in life that one does not even see in a moving picture.

"So, never have I seen on the 'screen,' as they call it, a thread and needle shop that was treated in the way that mine was! A real massacre! And I'm so orderly. One would have said that a scourge had passed by it; a volcano couldn't have done better! Oh, M. Commissioner, my shirting and my calico—he walked on them.

"It was lace that he wanted. All my fancy goods were nothing but a sponge. And my boxes of mercerized cotton! My skeins of Japanese silk. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! The cardboard boxes were emptied all together—thrown pell-mell out under our feet. If that wasn't misfortune. And my Hamburg wool and the fine St. Peter wool! Oh, I could have cried—I wanted to strangle him.

"But as soon as I made the slightest move, I heard M. Birouste call out: 'Hands up, for God's sake!' Begging your pardon, M. Commissioner—and all that to get my white muslin, which seemed to be the thing he wanted, and which he took to dress the poor young lady's wounds. But who's going to give me back by shirting and my calico. Are you going to, M. Commissioner?"

As to Mme. Camus, the church chair-renter, these were her first words:

"He was terrible, but my—wasn't he handsome? I have seen some handsome men, M. Commissioner. I know a handsome man, I do! I haven't always rented the chairs for the priests. As you see me, M. Commissioner, I was a saleslady at a time when, in my business, a young lady behind the counter was everything! And I beg you to know that they chose the least fools possible!

"I've had scented notes sent me; and I have seen the 'yellow gloves'—that's what they called them in my time, come along—I know a handsome man—but one as handsome as that I've never met.

"And he must have been handsome for me to have noticed him at such a moment when we all thought our end had come—he looked so awful! It surely wasn't M. Birouste who saved us—I should say not.

"He dropped his fine airs, I can tell you—did M. Her-

borist. He wasn't swaggering now—not he! He was all of a tremble behind the counter, and tired out his lungs shouting: 'Hands up, for God's sake,' just as I tell you—I really believe that if we had put our hands down he would have taken the revolver that Gabriel had put on one side of him, and he would have fired at us! A man—he—who has such airs because he's a herborist! It's all over between us. I'll never buy any more plasters from him! You follow me, M. Commissioner? And you understand me, I'm sure.

"All this time, Gabriel was only thinking of looking after Christine. All for her. That is what I call a man—bandit though he is. And he made us pass a pretty bad moment! But what a man! Not a muscle of his face moved! He wasn't afraid of blood—not he! And when he wanted to wipe it off his victim's forehead and did not find the linen at once that he wanted—ah, I can tell you that Mlle. Barescat's shop meant nothing to him! Why, he'd kidnaped that Christine! She'd fought him. He carried her off by force.

"There had probably been an accident on their little trip causing the blood which covered them. He was being pursued—trailed! He'd seen the light under Mlle. Barescat's door, and had taken a chance and knocked. I opened it to him. He dashed into the shop. That's what I think can explain the matter. If there are cleverer ones than me, let them tell it.

"That girl Christine still didn't open her eyes; and he threw all Mlle. Barescat's camomile tea that was left—and it was cold—right in her face. But all he did was to give her a slushing. That poor young lady—she'd no luck whatever. Who could have believed it?

"On Sundays at the church I have collected the moneys —a difficult job, M. Commissioner, for you've got to have your eyes everywhere; keep them all at the same time on those who remain in church, those who are going out, and those who are getting ready to go out without paying. Well, I still had an eye for beautiful Christine, who was as good-looking as a picture at the first communion, and to whom one would have, for sure, given the *bon Dieu* without confession!

"And then they find her at Benedict Masson's house in what sort of state? And here she is no better in this Gabriel's arms!

"Gabriel who? Gabriel what? Will one ever know? Is it true, perhaps, what they are beginning to say, and what we are afraid of? As to Gabriel, I can only see the angel of the same name who can be compared with this Gabriel. Heavens—he is a beauty! I tell you what I think, M. Commissioner: I could certainly never have resisted him in those days when I was a saleslady."

Regarding matters which concern M. Birouste, whose rôle is far from being ended, as we shall see soon, all we shall show for the moment is this statement by him:

"M. Commissioner, I only thought of one thing: that was to save the lives of these three poor women. Thanks to my coolness, my presence of mind—I'll let the others take the trouble to compliment my courage—I was able to prevent this wretch from leaving corpses behind him. I only did my duty, M. Commissioner—but I did it. I tell you this without pride, simply, as is correct from a herborist who lives in the comforting study of plants, and who is not a hero of melodrama."

Now, that, by this quick survey of the state of mind of our characters, we can get some idea of the consternation wrought at Mlle. Barescat's camomile by the thundering entrance of the terrible visitor, we will continue to relate the facts as a thorough inquest reconstituted them.

CHAPTER V

A Dead Man's Handwriting

For the moral health, thus shaken, of Mlle. Barescat and her guests, it was a good thing that Gabriel's visit to the haberdasher's shop in the Saint Sacrament Street was not more prolonged. In all his actions he showed a ferocious brutality, but he was far from appearing without anxiety.

Several times he went to the street door and listened with one ear to the sounds outside, and then returned to Christine, who still manifested no signs of life. The wind and snow storm, which had reached a great height, began to abate. Suddenly there was the sound of footsteps in the street, which seemed to come rapidly nearer, and also voices could be heard.

Gabriel, still silent—he had not yet uttered a word—turned to Mlle. Barescat and her guests, who, with their hands up, appeared petrified with terror, gave them a fear-inspiring look, fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a little notebook and a fountain pen. He wrote down a few words, tore out the leaf—all this in less time than it takes to say—and held it before the eyes of the three poor women whom the same feeling of dread had "stuck" together, the one against the other.

They had no sooner cast their glances on the words on the paper than they all, at the same moment, uttered a shriek to make the strongest, bravest heart shiver. But

their cry was quickly stifled by the strange bound made by Gabriel, who seemed provided with a spring, and who had again seized his revolver and threatened them.

M. Birouste, in order to be disturbed the least possible and to be able, undoubtedly, to care for the safety of the ladies in these fearful moments, and also because it was necessary to show determination on his own account, had closed himself up behind the counter, like a captain on the bridge of his boat in the hour of danger.

From this spot, which he had chosen as his military quarters, he had not been able to read anything Gabriel had written; but the latter had not forgotten him. He threw over his little slip of paper; and then it was the herborist's turn to shriek out; this outcry did not finish, either, for the reason already stated.

During this time the footsteps and the voices were coming nearer. Gabriel had picked up Christine again in his arms, and, turning toward the door, revolver clutched in his hand, he waited in a formidable attitude to see what would happen. The steps and the voices stopped outside the door, and then this gasping dialogue could be heard:

"I tell you that he's not gone out of the street."

"Oh, he can't be far."

"There is still a light in Mlle. Barescat's house. Perhaps she has heard something."

At this moment Gabriel, with a quick gesture, touched the button near the door which communicated with the rear room; thus the shop was thrown into darkness; but in the rear apartment there was still a light, upon seeing which Gabriel glided noiselessly there without letting go of his precious burden.

M. Birouste, Mlle. Barescat, Mme. Langlois, Mme. Ca-

mus did not breathe. They were as though turned to stone. The light which came in from the rear room now went out. This was certainly the most terrible moment in all their lives.

The conversation outside the door continued. Mme. Langlois had recognized the voices of old man Norbert and Jacques Cotentin.

"The light's gone out," said Jacques.

"Suppose we knock," suggested the watchmaker.

"Perhaps we shall be losing valuable time. We have only got to search every nook and cranny of the isle; he would not have gone off the island. He could not cross the bridge with Christine in his arms, without being seen."

A brief silence; then:

"Eh—but what's that?" came old man Norbert's rough voice.

"Why, it's the cord from his cloak," exclaimed the surgeon.

"It was caught on the door here," the watchmaker said.

"He has gone in there," cried Jacques. "Yes, he is in there! He is in Mlle. Barescat's."

And at once the thumping knocks were resumed on the door.

There was elicited no reply. Then they called:

"Mlle. Barescat! Mlle. Barescat!"

But in vain.

"It's extraordinary! Hi, there, Mlle. Barescat! *Mademoiselle!*" And they beat on the door again, violently.

A window in the street was opened, and a voice called out: "What do you want with Mlle. Barescat at this hour? She's been gone to bed a long time." And the window was quickly shut down.

It was very cold, and the snow was falling, and then—perhaps there was also fear in the street. But Jacques and the watchmaker did not knock again. They broke in the door. Jacques threw his weight against it and smashed it with his shoulder. The door was opened.

They rushed into the darkness—into the darkness and the silence! They called again to Mlle. Barescat. Jacques lit a match, by which he saw, in the intense relief which the feeble focus of fire furnished, in the pitchy blackness, four statues, with their hands up, mouths open, eyes staring.

The hot cinders of Vesuvius had not made more motionless in their last gestures the inhabitants of Pompeii than the great fear which now and here mummified Mlle. Barescat and her guests since they had read the bit of paper that Gabriel had passed before their eyes.

These four statues loomed up in the midst of an indescribable disorder, against which, with staggering steps, the old watchmaker and his nephew bumped and stumbled, and the full extent of which they were able to take in only when Jacques turned on the light. Yes, certainly Gabriel had passed through there.

The first trace of his passage—was it not this destruction, this stupefying of the senses of the first four individuals with which he found himself in contact, *since he had escaped from his cage*? Then there was the amazing overthrow of this poor little shop! What tornado could have done better than Gabriel in such a small space? And then—blood! Blood on the counter—blood on Mlle. Barescat's precious laces—blood on the walls! Christine's blood!

Ah—they tried to awaken these statues; to make them speak. But nothing—nothing. They might indeed push,

shake the others; the latter continued to look at them in silence.

"Which way did he go—which way did he go?"

"My daughter—where is my daughter? Only tell me what he has done with my daughter!"

They rushed into the rear of the shop—no one; but an open doorway into a little back yard; and out of this little yard another door. His footprints—his footprints in the snow! And here they are in a blind alley which led winding between high walls down to the quays. The two rushed off toward the quays.

Then, then only, when they thoroughly understood that Gabriel was not there, that there was no doubt as to his escape, and that he had continued on his way, carrying off his victim, in the night and mystery from which he had come out to terrify them—from which event Mlle. Barescat would never be completely cured—did the four statues lower their hands. Their arms dropped to their sides. And it was M. Birouste who was the first to set the example.

After which M. Birouste, without giving any heed to these ladies who implored him not to leave them, made for the street door quickly and hastened to enter into his own home. To do this he had only to go a few steps, because he lived next door.

The three ladies decided to spend the night together. They barricaded themselves in, pushed the furniture up against the doors, while talking the most incoherent language, and took refuge finally in the little room which served as a bedroom for Mlle. Barescat, and there passed the rest of the night.

Needless to say, they did not sleep. They did not even

try to talk. They had received a shock which paralyzed them for a long time. They thought only of one thing; that was the paper that Gabriel had made them read, and upon which he had written the words:

If you value your life, keep silent

These seven words constituted sufficient a threat, taking all into consideration, to frighten timid spirits, but it was not so much the sense of these words that had flung into the depths of horror our four persons. That we had seen them so suddenly reduced to nothing, was because in these seven words, written by Gabriel, they *had recognized the handwriting of Benedict Masson!*

CHAPTER VI

A Twelve-Hour Nap

When M. Birouste spoke of his courage, he had no intention of deceiving any one; he deceived himself merely. Our herborist had a false courage, as he had a false knowledge, false pride, false modesty, false drawers—wherein to hide the products that a druggist only has the right to sell—and false hair.

Convinced that he had pushed the devotion for his fellow men, if one could use this term where it is a question of a herborist and three old ladies, beyond the limits of ordinary heroism, it was with a great sigh of relief that he locked himself up in his own home, where he could not be taken unawares by surprises—the terrible surprises of science.

Alas! The sigh was more like a moan! One might brag, and say that he did not believe in anything that would cause one to recoil before mysteries; one might, indeed, walk on the level with genius, and state calmly to an audience of old, befuddled ladies that science had a capital S, after having subdued all the forces of the universe, and was very near to triumphing even over death.

But it was not without a certain dizziness, nor without a certain anxiety that one should see a species of so-called maniac appear, having been attended to in an exceptional fashion by an exceptional surgeon, who writes under your

eyes: "If you value your life, keep silent," and *that in the handwriting of a man who had been executed eight days before!*

M. Birouste, behind his closed door, had dropped down, exhausted, in a chair in his little shop, which was like a conglomeration of the vegetable kingdom. He looked at the walls, the drawers, the closets where the cowslip was drying at the side of the lime, where the white pellitories of the French valleys blended with the rhododendrons of the Alps, the glass jars in which reposed the ingredients of doctors' prescriptions; here the ipecacuanha—here's to you, Helvetius—there the periwinkle dear to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

This herborist knew what could be made with raw products, comose grass, roots stained with alluvia, when left to the druggist; the marsh mallow that comes out of his hands as white as ivory. Science had made him the purifier, the high priest of all this vegetable life. How is it that he could not understand what a skillful practitioner might accomplish in the animal kingdom?

Yes—but what he did not understand was that they had replaced the brain of a madman by the brain of an assassin. Ah—that was dangerous.

And this thought he expressed aloud, confided it to the friendly plants which were all around him and to which he addressed a mournful "good night" before going to bed. On the narrow stairs which led to the two rooms comprising the next floor, he uttered these words:

"But *that!* It's beyond me!"

He reached the door of his room and opened it. Oh! Horror! He found Gabriel there waiting for him, and Christine stretched out on the bed!

The young girl seemed to be a little better. Yet she still appeared incapable of making a move, either through weakness or terror and, perhaps, at the same time, for both reasons.

Her beautiful eyes, half opened, looked at M. Birouste with a glance, wherein the most ardent supplication, the most humble invocation, the most touching and also the most hopeless prayer were blended. "Help! For pity's sake, M. Birouste. You can see full well that if you forsake me I shall die."

Alas! M. Birouste was capable of little more than poor Christine; and if he had dared to call "Help," it would first of all have been for himself. That terrible Gabriel still clutched his revolver, and his look was glowering. It was too much for a herborist, who had thought that he had got rid forever of the presence of the frightful creature, and who found him in his own room, continuing to administer his delayed aid to his victim, on his own bed!

How should this have come about? If M. Birouste, instead of returning to his own home by the street, had gone back to his house by the rear, that is to say, by the blind alley at the end of which was Mlle. Barescat's house, he would have found the door of his little kitchen broken in —an achievement which would certainly not have required much of an effort from a man like Gabriel, though he carried in his arms a young lady who, none the less, appeared not to weigh more than the lace on her dressing gown.

And thus M. Birouste would have had some preparation for meeting in his house the intruders whose presences were particularly distasteful to him.

Old Norbert and Jacques were right in counting on the

difficulties which Gabriel would encounter in trying to leave the island with Christine in his arms. Knowing that he was closely followed, he was forced for the time being to find a shelter, at no matter what cost. After having taken refuge at Mlle. Barescat's, he now hid himself in M. Birouste's home until he could do better. They did not give him time to breathe.

Besides, he was not breathing!

We cannot say that despite all these avatars, there was a regular respiration; for although he had his mouth half open, showing remarkably fine teeth, the effect of breathing produced no noticeable movement; neither his mouth nor any feature of his face moved. The verses of Baudelaire seemed to have been written for this marvelous model of masculine beauty:

> I dislike the movement which displaces lines
> And I never weep and I never laugh.

One who was not laughing, and who was on the verge of weeping was M. Birouste. The herborist's first move when he caught sight of the fatal revolver had been to throw up his hands again. Once for all he had decided to offer no resistance to this cataclysm which seemed to follow him with such particular care. Upon seeing this, Gabriel made him an amiable sign which certainly meant:

"Put down your hands M. Birouste—I don't wish you any harm."

All the same, as Gabriel did not put his revolver back in his pocket, M. Birouste left his hands where they were. There was nothing else to do. He did not wish to give his guest an opportunity to commit a crime, which, besides, would have been quite useless.

To keep from slipping onto the floor our herborist at last dropped into a chair; and there he finally found strength to utter these words—for, when one thinks that one's last hour has come, one accomplishes supernatural things:

"You can count upon me, sir. I'll say nothing. I swear to you to be silent. I am a poor herborist. What can I do for you?" And other bits of phrases on the same order, which attested that Gabriel had not before him a very formidable opponent—not even an opponent; maybe even a friend.

The other pulled a little notebook out of his pocket and began to write. M. Birouste cast a quick glance at Mlle. Norbert, who was still lying stretched out on the bed. Christine's eyes continued to implore help, and with such eloquence that M. Birouste, who was not a bad man, turned away his head so as not to witness her despair; which gave him all the more pain inasmuch as he had decided not to help her.

When he had finished writing, Gabriel held out to M. Birouste his little paper. The herborist shook again to his very marrow—ah, there was no shadow of a doubt! He had not been dreaming—it was, indeed, the writing—long strokes, wavering, zigzag—of Benedict Masson! It was, naturally, not mixed up with all the colors of the rainbow—but despite its singular violet hue, there could be no mistaking it—and this is what M. Birouste read:

This young lady is getting better—she is quite wide awake now. I want you to get for me immediately what would be necessary to send her to sleep for at least twelve hours.

"Very good! Very good!" ejaculated the other with an eagerness which proved his zeal to wait upon such an exceptional client. "I have what you need. Why, of course—a herborist! I'll go and get it for you."

And he was already tumbling down the stairs, perhaps, with the vague hope of making his escape; would one ever know?

CHAPTER VII

Like a Grecian God

But Gabriel, after having locked the bedroom door, came tumbling down behind him. Our herborist had a special method of treating the poppy which he kept secret as much as possible, unless one were willing to buy it at a good price. But he gave Gabriel, free of charge, a bottle which could have sent a whole family to sleep.

When they went upstairs again in company—one did not leave the other—they found Christine lying in the middle of the room—evidently she had made some attempt to escape the dreadful fate which threatened her, but her strength had failed her.

Gabriel picked her up very tenderly and laid her very gently on the bed again; and, so that she should not renew her efforts, which, in her weak state, might be fatal, made her, with M. Birouste's help, drink the sleeping draught necessary for a well gained rest.

Gabriel then sat down at the foot of her bed and rested his head in his hands. It seemed as though he had gone off in an endless dream. Behind him stood M. Birouste, not daring to move. It was not the wish that was lacking—but he feared that a movement might be misinterpreted.

What a night! It seemed as though it would never end. Outside, the wind had quite fallen; there was nothing but silence—an awful silence in which the herborist could only

hear his own heartbeats. Certainly, this was enough to make one catch a serious illness. If he should get through this night without a lesion it would be because he had a strong heart.

What a vigil! On a stand a little night lamp was lit; Gabriel had lowered the shade. In his armchair this strange person, who still had his head in his hands, did not move any more than a waxwork figure in the Grevin Museum.

When one thinks—just thinks what it was that this man was holding in his hands—the brain of Benedict Masson—the brain of a gentleman who had assassinated *at least* seven women! Oh—the life of a man like M. Birouste to such a person would count for little! And, thinking only of that, the herborist thought that the night was indeed long.

The church clock of Saint Louis rang the hour three A.M. It was only three o'clock! And this was December; and in December dawn came late! The half hour—four o'clock—and still not a movement! What was this chap going to do? He did not look as though he intended to move.

If he remained all night with his Christine it was because he thought he was going to spend all next day there. Goodness gracious! He knew that he was being pursued; he probably had said to himself: "Where could I be better off than in this good M. Birouste's house—he does all that I wish." Would he also have to feed them?

Five o'clock! Did Gabriel sleep, by chance? Certainly he did not hear him snore. He didn't even hear him breathe. After such a night he was, perhaps, plunged in a leaden sleep. Supreme hope; and supreme thought!

Now M. Birouste gets up very gently—very gently; oh, so softly! Nothing creaked, not his chair, nor his shoe. To

reach the door, which opened on the landing, did not require more than four steps—let us say, five. Once on the landing the stairs could be taken at a leap—and then? And, then?

Oh—M. Birouste decided to risk all for all. He had made three steps—yes, but at the fourth the boards made such a plaintive squeak that he wept. While his tears flowed a cold sweat chilled his limbs. Ah, it was not warm in December in M. Birouste's hospitable little room! The herborist remained with one leg in the air.

But the terrible thing was that Gabriel, who was not asleep, had turned around; and here was his host with one leg and two hands in the air. He looked as though he were dancing a tight rope. It was quite enough to make Gabriel laugh; but Gabriel never laughed.

He put his hands in his pocket again—did Gabriel. Was he going to pull out that damn revolver? No! M. Birouste was reassured—it was only his little notebook. And then M. Birouste noticed that Gabriel had no longer the terrible look in his eyes. There was nothing in those eyes now but a great tenderness.

"He's getting human," thought the herborist, again beginning to breathe naturally and dropping into a chair. "But what's he going to ask me now?"

Gabriel wrote, and the host read:

Have you in your house a mirror wardrobe?

Did M. Birouste have a mirror wardrobe? Should say he did have a wardrobe with a mirror door! And if all that was needed to give Gabriel happiness was a wardrobe with a glass door, he'd give it to him at once.

He could even take it away with him. M. Birouste didn't

think anything of his wardrobe. He had put it in the guest's room: the guest's room was just at the side of his own bedroom. They communicated; you had only to push the door.

"You see, sir, this room is the guest's room. You can make use of it. It's yours—like everything else that is here. And, as to this mirror wardrobe, although it is a family heirloom, if it is any use to you—"

But Gabriel was not listening to him. He had gone to the door which gave on the landing, shut it, and taken out the key so as to be sure that M. Birouste would not escape. Then, with a sign, he ordered him to stay in the room to watch Christine; after which he went into the guest room, where he also locked the door. He had taken away the lamp with him.

"What's he going to do in that room? Why is he shutting himself in with a mirrored wardrobe?" wondered M. Birouste as he lit a candle with trembling hand. The herborist's curiosity was greater than his fear; he put his eye to the keyhole, and this is what he saw:

Gabriel, with a nervous gesture, had thrown off his cloak, unbuttoned his coat and vest, and pulled off his tie, which was wound two or three times around his neck; he threw all these articles onto a piece of furniture. Then he let down his shirt, and there he stood, naked to the waist. The light from the little lamp lit him up; the mirror reflected his image. He leaned over this image like a young god looking at himself in a brook.

"What a skin!" cried M. Birouste later to the police commissioner. "Soft, fine, satiny, like the skin of a young girl! And what a body. The statues at the Louvre show nothing more beautiful, nor more perfect. See, M. Com-

missioner—you've been to the Louvre some time. You don't always live with murderers—any more than I do with herbs—one likes to educate one's self.

"You have surely been through the Antiquity Halls; and you have seen Achilles—Achilles with the light feet, as they said in my days. That's art! That's no cubism—oh, no! It appears that that statue there, by the regularity of its form, the harmony of its lines—if I can express myself so—could serve, as they say, for the metrical standard for the beautiful proportions of the human body. Well, then, M. Commissioner, in my opinion, Achilles is *nothing at all* —just nothing at all, compared with this Gabriel!

"The Bacchuses, the Mercurys are—*tutti quanti*—real abortions at the side of Gabriel! I tell you what I think. I am not an artist; but, all the same, there is no reason in the world why a herborist shouldn't appreciate beauty like any other man.

"But there's Apollo du Belvedere—now that one—Gabriel's—hair even (he had taken his hat off, naturally) seemed to be something like his; with the down on the forehead which reminds one of a woman's hair. Yes—Apollo du Belvedere is the one that most resembles Gabriel. And, yet, he has too much hip—you see too much of his anatomy, while Gabriel was—how can I say it?—more enveloped. He was as strong, but more graceful."

"I see. I see," interrupted the commissioner. "Say at once that he's a Canova."

"Well—a Canova, if you like. I have never seen a Canova. Anyway, I don't like modern sculpture! But you'll agree, all the same, that it was torture for a man like me, who knows how to appreciate beautiful things, it was

torture to know that they had put in such a body—well, that they had put—"

"Very well! Very well! That's all understood," cut in the commissioner again. "Now, let's get along. Well, what did your Apollo du Belvedere do?"

"What did he do? Well—he didn't get tired of looking at himself. Hardly! He looked mighty pleased with himself, without counting—if it could be true—that this chap, who was so handsome, was looking with the eyes, and more especially with the brain."

"Yes—yes. That's all right. I see what you are driving at," the commissioner commented.

"Well, then, as this Benedict Masson was so ugly—you see—"

"M. Birouste, I am not asking you for that. What you think, and what you don't think is absolutely indifferent to me. I ask you what this man whom you call Gabriel *did?*"

The Missing Madonna

"Well, I tell you he looked at himself in the wardrobe mirror. He had taken the little lamp in his hand, and was studying himself from top to toe. He turned round and round and round. A woman who puts on a party dress for the first time doesn't take so much notice, nor so much care, nor be so satisfied with herself to make her bow to society as that man there, looking at his skin!

"And he passed his hand through his hair! And he put his face up against the glass quite close, as close as he could. He touched his cheeks, his chin, his nose, his mouth and his ears. He thought that he had beautiful teeth—and he might well. I can't tell you any better, I can't. He surely did eye himself with satisfaction."

"Well—did that last long?"

"About a quarter of an hour, I should say. Then suddenly—"

"Suddenly what?"

"Suddenly he seemed to remember something. He struck his forehead, and ran over to his clothes. Ran! That's not quite the word. But he had such a funny way of walking; and, at the same time, so light was he that at each step he took he gave one the impression that he was going to start running—sort of lift himself off the ground. Then he seemed to take a spring as though he was not going to stop

at once. But he stopped himself perfectly, quite suddenly.

"Well, he stopped just in front of his clothes and began fumbling in a pocket. He pulled out a little bunch of keys. All this happened just opposite to where I was standing. I could see his keys plainly; they were tiny little keys, about half a dozen, hanging on a ring. I noticed them because they were no ordinary keys—they had only the stems. Little hollow handles like watch keys—eh?

"He went up to the wardrobe mirror with the keys. And, placed as I was, I could not see what he was doing. His head was bent forward, and the hand which held the keys was close to his chest. When I think it over carefully, that hand would be close to his heart. I heard a peculiar sound which reminded me of the noise of a clock when it's being wound up, or of a safe that you want to open and you're playing about with the combination.

"Then the noise stopped suddenly. He still continued to make motions. Then suddenly he gave a cry of horror, threw up his hands, then let them fall again. I heard a sort of rattling, like the sharp click of a safe that one shuts. At the same time he bumped himself against the mirror in the most disorderly way. On my word of honor, I thought that he was going to break my wardrobe mirror!

"Then he turned round. Oh, M. Commissioner! When he appeared first before us at Mlle. Barescat's he surely did scare us—especially the ladies! But this time, *monsieur*—and I'm not one to be roused easily—I felt my hair stand on end! He looked worse than ever—dreadful—frightful! This time he had the eyes of a murderer! I felt that I could expect nothing good from this wild beast! He'd do anything! He pounced upon his clothes, and, with sudden jerks, began looking for his shirt.

"The condition that he was now in fortunately made him lose a lot of time. I decided then that I'd profit by it, and save this unfortunate girl from the claws of this wild creature and, naturally, save myself. If I was not successful it was not my fault. It was Mlle. Norbert's. She was in such a weak state that she couldn't give me any help at this terrible moment.

"So, then, M. Commissioner, at this very moment I pulled a sheet from the bed and twisted it into a rope. I opened the window; I fastened my sheet the best way I could to its frail support; and, in spite of the risk I was taking to go and get help, in this perilous manner, I did not hesitate to let myself slide into space.

"M. Commissioner, I am not an acrobat. I am accustomed to walk in and out of the doors. And not that way, as Mme. Camus would say, you only see in a moving picture. And yet, if any accident happens to the actor, they've got a mattress there ready, that they don't show us—ready waiting there to catch him. This is the feat that I, a simple herborist, accomplished. But it was a question of leaving that what-you-may-call-it of a Gabriel to carry off poor Mlle. Norbert again like a wild creature.

"At the very moment when I was about to disappear she came out of the fainting fit into which she had fallen, and turned to me. She still had enough strength to call out: 'Oh, M. Birouste—save me.'

" 'Surely!' I replied. 'Wait for me. I'll be back soon.' A moment later I was on the pavement. I pretty near fell into the arms of M. Norbert and Jacques Cotentin, who were still looking for their man.

" 'Don't go and look any further,' I panted. 'He is up there in my house with his victim.'

" 'Open this door for us.'

" 'Here are my keys,' I replied, 'and may God let you arrive in time!' As to me, I was in such a weak condition that I felt I should have the greatest difficulty in following them. 'Be careful; he's got a revolver,' I warned them.

" 'Oh, his revolver isn't worth anything,' Norbert flung back. 'It doesn't work—it's not loaded.'

"M. Commissioner, there are moments when one accomplishes miracles. I dragged myself along behind them, and went into my shop, which the wild beast had made his den. But when we reached the first floor, or rather when they arrived there, for I had stopped, exhausted, behind the counter of my shop, there was no one there. The sinister bird of prey had flown off again, carrying in his claws the Madonna of the Isle of Saint Louis."

CHAPTER IX

What Happened to M. Lavieuville

MONSIEUR LAVIEUVILLE, independent gentleman, bachelor, humanitarian and churchwarden, had come to end his days in the Isle of Saint Louis, which had been the scene of his schoolboy days. He lived in the same house in which his parents had died.

He was a good man, with only one aim in life; that was to do good with other people's money. Apart from that, he was prodigiously avaricious; recently he had sent his old servant away, and took on the cooking himself, having reduced the domestic help to Mother Langlois, who always came early in the morning—we will say at once that on this particular morning she did not come. In the parish he was cited as an example of abnegation and of voluntary poverty.

The community was proud of having its churchwarden pass for a saint. Being a lawyer, he could have speculated with the funds which his clients deposited with him; but he had never done so. Churchwarden, president, treasurer, secretary of twenty aid societies, he could have reaped a profit with the elasticity of certain charitable budgets; or fixed his accounts in a way that would comprise certain general expenses; but there was nothing with which they could reproach him.

It was quite fair for him to pay himself back in the most

decent way possible, with the upkeep of a modest little automobile, which he drove himself, closed-in, because he feared the fresh air; and which was a necessity for him in order to make his trips about the city and into the suburbs. His avarice from this point of view was something special.

Provided that he was handling funds, even if it were for others, he was the happiest of men. He even preferred that it should be other people's money, because in the handling of funds there is always a certain amount of risk. He derived intense joy just from fingering bank notes. He always carried them in his pocketbook, which never left him.

His greatest pleasure was to visit the homes of poor people and make them display their distress; then he would spread out his bank notes, and say to them: "Look! Here are fifteen thousand francs. And yet with all that I am more unfortunate than you. I need ten times as much to relieve the distress which I encounter every day." And then he would go off, leaving them a penny.

"You will be robbed," they said to him.

To this he replied: "God protects charitable money." But as he only counted upon himself to protect his own money, he did not carry it about with him. These details are necessary so that the reader will not be too surprised at what befell M. Lavieuville on the Isle of Saint Louis at half past six in the morning.

It was the morning after the fateful night, where we have seen brave M. Birouste in the power of the terrible Gabriel. Since they had left the herborist's home, after having made sure that Gabriel had fled from his abode, carrying off Christine, old Norbert and his nephew had not

ceased searching for them. Every nook and cranny of the Isle of Saint Louis had been scoured.

Oh, what a night they, too, had passed! They were exhausted, but neither of them felt their fatigue. The acute feeling of the mortal danger hovering over poor, unfortunate Christine urged them always forward. Meeting with no success on the island, they had crossed the bridge into the city proper. They had questioned the vagabonds; queried a drunken fellow sprawling on a bench; a hot-chestnut vender who was lighting his fires; made the rounds of the Celestine quays; delved into the dark nooks of Geoffroy-l'Asnier; and probed all the recesses of the narrow alleys between Saint Paul and Saint Gervais.

Then they made the round of the square of Notre Dame, and the Turnelle quays. Finally they returned to the Isle of Saint Louis, at the moment when it was emerging from the fogs of the Seine, in the livid rays of chilly morning—when, suddenly, at the corner of the little street where M. Lavieuville's, the churchwarden's house stood, they caught sight of—there could be no mistaking it—the figure of Gabriel!

He was alone and walking quickly, or, rather, running. With a final leap he reached the door of M. Lavieuville's dwelling. Jacques wanted to dash in, but the watchmaker restrained him.

"Be careful," he urged. "This time don't let us miss him. We must not give him any warning. We can see what he is going to do. You know that we cannot put him out while he is moving."

"Oh—but what can have happened to Christine now?" moaned Jacques.

"I think that she has managed to escape from him. Perhaps, she is already back home."

"Look! What's he doing?"

To their amazement they saw Gabriel pull out from under his coat a bunch of keys, and without the least hesitation put one of them in the lock of M. Lavieuville's door.

"He's going into the churchwarden's home."

It was true. He had just entered the house. It was now old Norbert's and Jacques's turn to spring forward.

"If we want to catch him," counseled the old man, "jump on him immediately and turn him over. He has a great deal of trouble to get up and recover his balance."

The door had been closed again. They rushed into the house and, in the semi-obscurity, bumped up against the form they were pursuing. Old Norbert clung onto the long black cloak; Jacques gave Christine's kidnaper a sudden trip-up which sent him sprawling on the rug, into which the uncle and nephew at once proceeded to roll him with a decisive brutality which gave him no chance to work free.

Besides, he offered no fight. As soon as he was on the floor he was motionless. When he was only a package of which one could not tell the nature, they got him outside and carried him off as quickly as possible, skirting the walls as far as the Street of the Holy Sacrament.

The only person they met was Father Juillard, the commission agent, returning from the markets, three sheets to the wind. He looked at them as they passed, with a foolish air.

"Beating your carpets at this hour?" he cried. "All the same, this isn't the season to be worried about moths."

At last they were in their home, calling to Christine.

There was no reply. They shut themselves up with their burden in the little house at the end of the garden, and began carefully to unroll the rug wrappings. Both were in a dripping perspiration, panting for breath, and at the end of their strength.

"Be careful," warned Jacques; "we must keep our eyes on him. Such a thing must not happen again!"

"Oh, as long as he is on the ground, I tell you, there is no danger."

"We must lay him down, stretched out with weights, and not leave him for a moment."

"You stay here beside him; I'll go and look for Christine."

"No. I'll go."

"Pray Heaven, that nothing has already happened to her. Oh, Jacques! Jacques! What have you done with my automaton?"

"Oh, be silent! If all is lost, I'll blow my brains out!"

So as not to be taken off their guard, Jacques had turned on the large electric lights. They moved agitatedly about in the dazzling white light. Both stood in readiness to throw themselves on Gabriel at the slightest suspicious sign. Then they let out a dull exclamation. The prisoner that they had taken, and who was wearing Gabriel's cloak and hat was not Gabriel, but the churchwarden!

CHAPTER X

A Father's Promise

As soon as they saw their mistake, old Norbert and Jacques Cotentin had but one thought: to make all dark where there had been such bright light! After they had switched off the illumination, they helped M. Lavieuville to his feet, and hastened him out of the laboratory without delay.

Each gripped him under the arm and escorted him as far as the watchmaker's shop, where the churchwarden dropped into a chair. The shutters were still up at the windows on the street, but the December light penetrated through the windows on the garden.

"Gentlemen!" moaned the muffled voice of M. Lavieuville, who had recognized M. Norbert and the already celebrated surgeon. "Gentlemen, you must agree that all that has happened to me this morning is incredible!"

"Incredible! Perhaps, you would like to take some tea —something good and hot?"

"No. All I want is to get back to my house, and inform the police!"

"M. Lavieuville," began the watchmaker dryly, in a voice which the churchwarden found somewhat menacing, "before bringing the police into such an affair, which is purely a family affair, as we will prove to you in excusing ourselves for an error of which you have been the victim,

you will, perhaps, tell us how it is that you wear a garment which does not belong to you, and which was responsible for our mistake?"

"Goodness gracious! M. Norbert, I see no reason why I shouldn't tell you. I didn't steal this cloak, please believe me—but some one took mine and gave me this one. That is all there is to it. And as to the conditions under which this annoying exchange was made, those neither will I hide from you and, perhaps, then you can give me the key to this situation, for I must confess that I am more and more mystified at to what has happened to me."

"M. Lavieuville, we again ask your pardon," Jacques now said. "Do not hide anything from us. Perhaps a person's life is at stake?"

"I quite thought that mine was," commented M. Lavieuville, shaking his gray head sadly. "Well, if I get out of it for fifteen thousand francs, I shall think myself lucky—although that does not belong to me! Perhaps I ought even to congratulate myself for your interference, rough though it was, for by it I have secured witnesses who will corroborate what I say, if there are base minds who will question the truth of my honesty, which, with charity also, is my only reason for being here below."

"What—you—with the respect of all who know you, M. Lavieuville," protested the watchmaker. "But it is not a question of fifteen thousand francs!"

"Pardon! Pardon! It certainly is a question of fifteen thousand francs—not a sou more or less!"

"M. Lavieuville, have pity on the state of mind in which you see us. Tell us what has happened to you."

"These francs belong to the parishioners. I was commissioned to convert them into National Defense bonds;

and, as my intention was, after having attended the six o'clock mass and made my daily visit to a few poor families in the district and the suburbs, to go to the bank. I was carrying the money on me, inclosed in my pocketbook. At the first stroke of mass, I left my home, got out my little car from the garage which had just opened, and got up into my machine.

"At this moment I wanted to settle a small bill which I owed to the garage man. I pulled the notebook out from the inside pocket of my vest, and took out a fifty-franc note, for which the garage man gave me forty-five centimes in change. I counted this change before dropping it into my pocket; and I did not notice I had placed it in the inside pocket of my overcoat instead of putting it in the pocketbook back into my vest pocket.

"My overcoat, sir, is a real long overcoat, lined with rabbit-skin, and has an imitation astrakhan collar. That is seemly to a man of my character who consecrated the little that he possesses to relieve as much as possible the needs of his fellow beings. That overcoat was warm and comfortable; it was all that I needed.

"With it I wore an imitation sealskin cap with ear protectors which fit close to the head and with which one can brave the coldest weather. I tell you all this, gentlemen, because it might be useful to you later and, besides, in such an extraordinary affair, the smallest detail should not be forgotten.

"A few minutes later, I stopped my car before the little church door that you know well—for I have often seen you at mass on Sundays with your daughter, and that's what gives me confidence in spite of all! I was at mass; Abbot Lequesne, whom you also know well, was officiating;

after the mass I joined him in the sacristy and, while he was dressing, I conversed with him on some charitable works that we had undertaken together. Then he left the sacristy.

"I went back into the church to offer a few more devotions, as is my custom, for I like to commune alone with God, then I went out by the little door. I was just about to get up into my machine when, suddenly, I saw a man rush out from behind the church with a long cloak with which he was trying to cover a human body, the body of a woman, as well as I could judge in my confusion.

"This man, who had terrible eyes, jumped upon me, threatening me with his revolver. He knocked me to the ground with a blow of his knee on my stomach—I can feel it now—threw the human bundle that he was carrying into the rear of my car, came back to me, and took from me, in less time than I can tell it, my overcoat and my sealskin cap which he snatched from my head. Then he threw the cloak which he wore to me, also his hat, closed the door of the machine, started it and disappeared in the direction of the Sully Bridge.

"I got up so dazed, so crushed that I had not the strength to call out. As it was very cold and I am rather a chilly sort of person, I dread inflammation of the lungs and colds in the head more than anything.

"So the first thing I did was to wrap myself up in that lunatic's cloak and put his hat on my head. Then I went staggering back to the church. I went inside. I did not see any one. I thought then that the police ought to be informed at once. I have a telephone in my own place.

"I ran home. I opened the door. I had no sooner opened it than I was again pounced upon and thrown to the

ground. I quite thought that my bandit had returned and that this time I would not be able to escape from him. I recommended my soul to God—and you know the rest, gentlemen."

"M. Lavieuville," said the watchmaker in a hoarse voice, trembling with grief, "you are to be pitied because you have been attacked and robbed. But we are more to be pitied than you. The man who did you this injury is a poor crazy fellow—"

"A relative that my nephew and I are caring for in our home," he added, turning as red as a child who tells an untruth. "Unfortunately he has conceived for my daughter, who is engaged to be married to M. Jacques Cotentin, an infatuation which has made his illness degenerate into a raving madness.

"Profiting by a moment when we had relaxed our watch, he escaped from us and carried off my poor Christine, whom he has brutalized as a savage would, throwing her to all that comes in his way as an obstacle. My nephew and I heard the shrieks of my poor girl, and we hurried—but, alas, he had already gone through the garden and the shop, picking up a revolver from the table, which I had left there to be repaired.

"He was already far down the street when we got to the door. The night, the darkness, the wind, the snow, the tempest, hampered us—and he disappeared with his victim. For hours we had been looking for him when we saw you, wrapped up in his cloak and wearing his hat."

"Ah—I understand! I understand!"

"You understand now, M. Lavieuville. And understand this above all—and it is a father and a *fiancé* who implore

you; besides, they know they are not addressing themselves in vain, to a charitable heart—understand that the police must not be informed yet. It is a question of my child's honor! Such a scandal would ruin her and would ruin us. We will do all to avoid it.

"This poor, crazy fellow could not have gone very far. He has taken your machine—well, so much the better; by that he can be trailed all the easier. He took your coat and your sealskin cap—so much the better; in his foolishness he thinks that he is disguised and secure from our searches; but he will be all the easier to catch."

"Ah—so much the better. So much the better! You are very good, gentlemen; you are, indeed! You forget that he has also taken my fifteen thousand francs!"

"Your fifteen thousand francs will be returned to you with your car, your overcoat and your cap, M. Lavieuville. We only ask you to give us twenty-four hours!"

CHAPTER XI

Stabbed to the Hilt

M. FLOTTARD kept a cook-shop at Pontoise. M. Flottard was not an ordinary *rôtisseur;* he was a literary *rôtisseur.* He had begun his career by being a dish washer at Sallis's at the time when this famous *cabaretier* existed in the good old days at the Chat Noir, in the Rue de Laval, which street is now called the Rue Victor Masse.

It is there that he got his taste for literature; there where he realized how an intelligent man in the lemonade or restaurant business could put a price to his goods by having artistic surroundings.

It was merely a question of selecting a style. M. Flottard had a little flute-like voice, so he selected "style song writers." And, as in the "big boss" time, and at the time of Caran d'Ache, they had inculcated in him a love for Napoleon; he became a Bonapartist.

The conclusion to all this is that for the last fifteen years any tourist who knows "what is what" in the good things of life, and who happened to be passing by Pontoise at the luncheon hour, never failed to stop at the *rôtisserie* of good old Flottard, who, at dessert, would sing so prettily his songs of Beranger.

And I beg you to believe that after the most reluctant customer, when the time came to settle his bill that was too highly seasoned, heard M. Flottard in the "Old Corporal,"

he soon withdrew his protests and pulled out his cash; he did not want to have to "quick march" himself.

M. Flottard opened his *rôtisserie* on the slope of Pontoise, and, although everything there was to the glory of Napoleon, the great hall, with its immense chimney where the spits turned, was none the less, with the Gothic wainscoting, stamped with the Middle Ages, which was deemed correct in the establishment of a gentleman *cabaretier*.

On the chimney shelf was a plaster bust of Napoleon. The walls were hung with lithographs representing the Eve of Austerlitz, the Fall of Ulm, the Death of Poniatowski, the Martyrdom of Saint Helena, and the Apotheosis of the Old Braves. Not having been able to find a bust of Beranger, he had bought an extraordinary plaster representing an old druid with a flowing beard and playing a harp. With his knife, with which he cut the chickens' necks, he had carved on it the name "Beranger," and placed it at the entrance to the summerhouses.

Poor Beranger! That morning was, indeed, a desolate one! While the last icicles which the night had reclothed were thawing around him, M. Flottard, comfortably warm before his blazing fire, was holding up for Mme. Flottard's admiration a magnificent, brand new kitchen knife, large at the base, and pointed like the needle of a spire, fine-handled, well sharpened, both strong and pliant as a switch, a specimen of fine cutlery if ever there was one.

A knife which was more than a knife, and less than a cutlass, and which probably had won a gold medal for the customer of Chatellerault, who had just sent it by parcel post to M. Flottard as a token of gratitude and appreciation in behalf of his inner man.

"And they talk of English cutlery," exclaimed our host. "What do you think, Mme. Flottard?"

"I think that they're wrong," said Mme. Flottard, who, ensconced behind her counter, was knitting a pair of gray socks, her chest comfortably covered with a thick woolen shawl.

"That they are wrong in what?"

Mme. Flottard is humble and submissive; she never raises her voice in the presence of her husband. She is always of his opinion, and never speaks to him but with fear and respect, which is very exasperating for a man who desires nothing more than an argument.

This latent antagonism, which had no opportunity to display itself, an opportunity which M. Flottard would seize with as much alacrity as possible, for he felt that by it he would experience a great relief, had taken birth many years before in that apathetic manner with which Mme. Flottard had always heard M. Flottard sing.

M. Flottard was not looking for compliments; oh, no; but he liked them, and Mme. Flottard was, perhaps, the only one who did not go into ecstasies over his "little flutelike voice."

"You think, perhaps, that I sing out of tune?" he asked her finally one day.

Mme. Flottard protested gently. In any case, if she thought such a thing, she would take good care not to express it; and it was certainly not at this moment, when M. Flottard played with such a splendid specimen of Chatellerault industry, while singing between his teeth "Yes, I Will Shake the Dust," that she would be so rash as to tell him that for the fifteen years that she had been con-

demned to submit to it, the muse of Beranger had simply sickened her.

And the good lady was quite right to be on her guard, for never had M. Flottard been so wrought up. For two days he had not seen a customer.

"Black men, from whence do you come!" (This is weather for dogs!) "Queen of the Earth, oh, France, my Country, lift at last your scarred forehead!"

It was not that the automobiles were not passing; they were passing all right, but they were not stopping.

M. Flottard knew very well where they did stop.

The summer before last a competitor had opened up a little farther down on the banks of the river, and at this rival's place—he was a sort of off and on pal—they did not sing. They danced! They had a phonograph, and the customers got tangos and fox trots. "That's what you call progress! Their progress! Oh, Heaven—society, old and staid edifice."

An automobile! A car stopping outside; not a very swell car, to be sure, just a modest little machine. From behind his curtain M. Flottard watched for his client as a brigand of Calabres behind his rocks watched for the travelers.

The door opens. What sort of customer is this? And in the short space of time, very short space of time in which the door of the machine was opened, the *rôtisseur* saw—thought he saw—a woman's form stretched out, the hair disheveled, a face of death. A strange sort of chap, fixed set face, eyes that were not pleasant, wearing an old overcoat with a collar of imitation astrakhan, his head covered with an imitation sealskin cap, well-worn, moth eaten, miserable.

Queer sort of customer! M. Flottard did not know

whether to open the door to him, or to barricade himself in. But the stranger had walked into the room with a decision that was somewhat disturbing; he pushed under M. Flottard's eyes a note which he held all in readiness in his hand and upon which the *rôtisseur* read:

Have you a traveling rug?

"*Monsieur,*" he replied, more wrought up than ever at an entrance for such an object, "the bard of Beranger, *monsieur!* This is not the Gallery Lafeuillette!"

Taking no more notice of the *rôtisseur* than if he did not exist, the customer went straight to *madame*. M. Flottard, whose mind was preoccupied with the vision he had glimpsed in the car, took advantage of the door being open, and slipped out to the machine.

He quickly opened the door, and then slammed it to again with a hoarse cry of horror, and came back swiftly into his restaurant in time to hear Mme. Flottard let out a scream of terror. In a brutal manner the traveler had just dragged off the woolen shawl which so comfortably covered the bust of the chilly landlady, while with the other hand he threatened her with a revolver, leveled point-blank!

That was too much for a *rôtisseur* who had just put down a big Chatellerault knife—brand new, a knife which had not yet been used! M. Flottard most assuredly had not thought of "trying" it on a guest who did not belong to his poultry yard; but one did not always choose the occasions. As they often say: "Your hand is forced."

And, in truth, it was no reason because Mme. Flottard did not appreciate to its full value the talent of her hus-

band, that he should let her be assassinated before his eyes without protesting. He protested then with his knife, and plunged it up to the hilt in this redoubtable and mysterious person who drove about in his machine a young woman half dead, and who took his literary cabaret for a department store!

Yes—right up to the hilt! And the knife went into the gentleman's back as though into butter!

Right up to the hilt! Right up to the hilt! This we don't know how to repeat enough—for, extraordinary event, unheard of, astounding, extravagant, fabulous, phenomenal, pyramidal, without its equal, *the gentleman did not seem to notice it!*

He did not even turn around, and having got possession of the shawl, but evidently not wishing Mme. Flottard to take him for a common thief, he offered her a bank note for a thousand francs, and waited calmly for the change.

But as Mme. Flottard, in a confusion that one can well imagine, did not appear in a hurry to give back the change to him so patiently waiting, and as he seemed in haste himself, he put the note back into his pocketbook, strode through the room, left the *rôtisserie*, passing in front of the petrified M. Flottard, and got up into his car—*still with the knife in his back!*

News of Terror

Well, singing Beranger's songs is all over for the time being! Poor M. Flottard! Good-by, love, friendship, wine which snaps one's fingers at all *etiquette-turlurlette-ladérirette*. Good-by, jolly turn-spit, at least for to-day. Turn-spit? Why, all that M. Flottard could think of was his knife! And Mme. Flottard? Oh, the tragedy!

One would say that with such a crazy man they had had a narrow escape! Yes, but there is one thing which they have not escaped; that is the sight of this man going off calmly with a knife in his back! That sight will haunt them for many a day.

"When you stabbed him," sighed Mme. Flottard, "I thought that he was going to fall down stunned."

M. Flottard did not reply. It was he who was stunned.

If the fires of heaven had suddenly struck him during a storm, they would not, momentarily, more singularly have fixed him to the wall which prevented him from falling, than this surprise which had stamped such a grimace on his face that Mme. Flottard would have laughed if she had not wanted to cry.

She still had enough strength to murmur a few incoherent words, for what was uppermost in her mind was that she had escaped a great danger by the heroic act of her husband.

The fact that the bandit had not been killed she thought likely was due to M. Flottard's hand trembling at the supreme moment, or something approaching that. The knife might have swerved, for instance. It might have become caught in the fur lining of the overcoat, the thickness of which would have so well allayed the shock that the robber of her shawl might not have noticed it. Yes—she could imagine anything but the truth.

But the one who had committed the deed—*he* knew! He knew that his knife had gone into the man like into butter, up to the very hilt; and that the man had taken no more notice of it than he might of a mosquito bite.

Thereupon, Duratin, the market gardener, had come in. He was closely followed by little Gustave, the sheriff's clerk, who had come to take his *aperitif* at Father Flottard's, where he had made a rendezvous with his friend Elias, the bottle washer at M. Arago's, the chemist. Friend Elias would not be long in coming.

Then arrived a chance-comer, Happy Canard, who was more or less of a mechanician, glazier, floor polisher, sign painter; in fact, a handy man, who, in truth, spent most of his time doing nothing, "fooling" with friends and treating them at the bar. One could imagine what this story of the brand-new kitchen knife that the traveler had gone off with sticking in his back, up to the hilt, would become with such a man!

The first comers had been quite frightened at the state in which they found M. and Mme. Flottard. The little that they had been able to understand from the few words dragged from them in their emotion, had firmly convinced them that the gentleman cabaretier and his wife had escaped a dreadful disaster.

But when urged on by Happy Canard, who, as usual wanted nothing more than a joke, M. Flottard finally got his breath and collected his thoughts and told a little of the exceptional conditions of this amazing affair, this handy man, it can be told, got all the enjoyment that he was looking for.

Then they commenced to cheer up around him and, while M. and Mme. Flottard still had faces like an undertaker's assistants, little Gustave and friend Elias, together with the three servants who had hurried in at the sounds of commotion, joined in chorus with the jolly joker.

As to Duratin, the market gardener, who took everything seriously, he had already gone out and was spreading the news that an attempt had been made to murder M. and Mme. Flottard—who were in a state not much better. A quarter of an hour later there were two hundred persons outside the *rôtisserie*.

It was at this moment that a taxicab coming from Paris at full speed stopped abruptly before this excited crowd. Two men got out quickly, asking explanations. They were old man Norbert and Jacques Cotentin.

We had left them with M. Lavieuville. Using the vague information that the honorable churchwarden had given them, and knowing that Gabriel had driven the little car in the direction of the Sully Bridge, they had gone rapidly in this direction. Going up the left bank of the river, they soon had the proof that the one they were after had stopped at the corner of the Cardinal Lemoine Street and the Boulevard Saint Germain, at a garage which had just opened. Here he had asked *in writing* whether they could sell him or show him a road map of Seine-et-Oise.

"He surely was dumb, wasn't he, gentlemen?" asked

the garage man. "He appeared in a great hurry. A queer sort of chap! You could only see the tip of his nose from under the cap which muffled him up; the collar of his overcoat was turned up. On my word, he looked as though he was hiding himself. He kept his head turned all the time.

"Then he caught sight of that map there over on the wall—he went up to it—studied it for a few seconds, his finger following the road to Conflans, Pontoise and the Isle-Adam, then he went off, without even giving one sou for a tip."

Norbert and Jacques had thought that they would hire a car from this garage, but finding that they would lose another quarter of an hour, they jumped into a passing taxi, promised the chauffeur a fabulous tip, and drove out of Paris through Asnieres. At Argenteuil they again got on to the trail of Gabriel and his car—also at Conflans—and then between Conflans and Pontoise they lost the track.

Gabriel had certainly left the main road. They lost precious time, almost two hours, in scouring all the suburbs. At last, at a moment when they were giving up in despair, they again found the trail and even a strengthening belief that they were following him at no great distance. He must have had a blowout in the open country, they conjectured; and they found themselves on the road to Pontoise, which Gabriel had again taken with, at least, a twenty-minutes' advance on them.

At the slope toward Pontoise, they came upon the crowd that we have described; and jumped from their machine in the expectation that they were going to hear something of their prey.

It did not take many minutes to learn that the one they were after had, indeed, stopped there. The story of the assault and, more especially, the case of the knife planted in the back of a gentleman who did not seem to have noticed it, was sufficient to enlighten them.

"It is he," Jacques whispered in old Norbert's ear. "In this bitter cold Christine must be frozen; and he does not dare take off his overcoat on account of his costume, which could not pass unnoticed. He stole the shawl for her. Poor Christine. I'm a wretch!"

"You are," agreed old Norbert. "Now, let's get going."

They got up again into their taxi, while the discussion continued regarding the event, which some took seriously and others made fun of. At the moment of their departure, they overheard Happy Canard, who cried out laughingly to the gentleman cabaretier:

"Eh, Flottard, that will teach you another thing: not to leave the knife in the wound! Besides, it will be an inconvenience for that customer of yours when he takes off his overcoat!"

Norbert and Jacques counted upon finding Gabriel somewhere between Pontoise and the Isle-Adam. But the little car had not been seen in that direction. They were forced to return and take the road which led to Viosne. But here again there was no trace, and they found no more.

We will not give the details of their useless researches during the days which followed, nor the lamentable state of mind in which they were—this we shall be able to see later.

They had just returned one day, cast down with despair, to old Norbert's shop, when the newsboys came scampering

down the streets, selling special editions of the evening papers.

"The Crimes of Corbillieres Continue—Two More Victims!" was bruited about.

"It is he!" cried the watchmaker, turning upon Jacques like a madman. "He has returned to Corbillieres!"

CHAPTER XIII

At the Green Tree Inn

HERE is a résumé of what had been published in the newspapers. For the last two days things had happened at Corbillieres and, also, in the offices of the Sûreté, events which the authorities there tried as much as possible to keep secret, for parties had had the exceptional audacity to revive an affair that the police fully believed had been buried with the criminal.

A young servant girl, recently arrived at the Green Tree Inn, had disappeared one evening, and had been found another evening in the slimy swamp of Corbillieres, strangled rather as Violette had been, carrying still on her neck the trace of the fine cord with which they had caused the poor, little eighteen-year-old Mariette to pass from life to death.

The trace of this lasso could not be found on the remains of little Annie, whose body had been too consumed by fire at the time of the first discovery of the horrible tragedy at Corbillieres; but—two days after Mariette had vanished—a young widow who lived alone since her husband's death in a little house in the neighborhood had been found in her cellar, also strangled in the same manner.

These events had thrown, as one might well think, into complete confusion the police and the magistracy. Such

happenings meant nothing less than the establishing of the innocence of the man they had just guillotined.

The first magisterial investigations had been conducted with the greatest secrecy, but the complete mystery with which they wished to surround them could not hold against the increasing rumor and, above all, the wave of terror which swept over the neighboring country.

For the past forty-eight hours the reporters had been jumping on the job. While some raced over the country, others sat scribbling furiously in the offices of the Sûreté Générale. And the terrible news—terrible for the law—burst like a bomb: Benedict Masson was innocent!

Ah—the law and the police were going to have some bad times! A reporter from the *Epoch* managed to interview the Keeper of the Seals, who could no longer put off replying to the urgent questionings which were put to him by the mouth of this interviewer.

And, at bay, he furnished the last argument that had been breathed. There was no doubt crimes had been committed since Benedict Masson's execution—which strangely recalled the tragic ending of Father Violette—but even admitting that Benedict Masson was innocent of that crime, he was, none the less, guilty of the assassination of little Annie.

To this, the reporter had rejoined that nothing of any kind had been found around little Annie, and that his argument was deficient even in its foundation. The Keeper of the Seals could add but one thing; and that was that Christine Norbert's testimony left nothing to be desired as to Benedict Masson's guilt!

This was not in accord with public opinion, which is always most simple; and which could be summed up:

"They had guillotined Benedict Masson for crimes which were still going on," and they recalled that he had cried out while under the knife of the guillotine: "I am innocent."

It was in the light of these facts and fancies that old Norbert and Jacques Cotentin arrived at the Green Tree Inn. They did not know this part of the country; no one knew them. Mother Mouche greeted them with a smile. We should have already said that Mother Mouche had regained all her natural good humor since the death of her husband.

There was certainly in the late events nothing to transform this cheerfulness into sadness. Certainly, she had been very grieved, for she had a kind heart, at the premature end of her servant; but she had been really too short a time at the Green Tree for her mistress to have felt for her any feeling of friendship, or even of simple attachment; and, as a result of these mysterious deaths, the inn did not get empty, so that Mother Mouche had soon forgotten the horror in the face of the happy returns it brought her.

Usually, there was practically no winter season at the Green Tree Inn. Now Mother Mouche had never done better business. The police, the law-people, the journalists had become her strong customers; and gave her advertising which attracted to her inn people from all over the county. And on Sundays fine parties even came from Paris. In the evening the inn was empty; each one returned home; the reporters hurried to their newspapers. It was in the evening when the watchmaker and his nephew arrived; they ordered supper and two rooms.

Before coming to the Green Tree, they had passed by Corbillieres, where they had alighted from the train. There

they had skillfully put questions; but nothing in the replies led them to think that Gabriel had come by there. The fur overcoat, trimmed with the imitation astrakhan, and the sealskin cap were quite unknown here. The two men had gone down then into the desolate solitude of the swamp; they had come to the banks of the little pond with its murky waters.

And they knew that the deserted villa which reared up its lugubrious shadow before them was the sinister abode about which there had been so much talk. It appeared to be sealed up like a tomb; all was shut, barricaded. Front-facing of wood, front of brick, face of glass under its thick winter veil—a sight to make one shudder. They walked around it, filled with the most somber thoughts. It was here that poor Christine had given her first cry of distress. And where was Christine now?

All the same, if the other was really innocent, one might still have hope. They were hoping.

Nothing up till then indicated to them the return of him to this dreadful place where the *crimes continued*. They climbed up the hill across the wood; they went down again into the valley of the "Two Doves," knowing that they would find on the way the Green Tree and Mother Mouche, who had taken her part at the trial.

And now they were sitting with their soup before them in the low dining room, and making the landlady talk—a task that was not difficult. She had acquired great importance since the last affair. This put her on the highest plane; her photograph had appeared in the newspapers. She was proud, for she was pleased with herself and all the world, and full of good will for the customer.

Neither had she seen any one that resembled the party

whose description the gentlemen gave. Just think! She would certainly have noticed him: a man with a sealskin hat, an overcoat with an imitation astrakhan collar and top boots; and she left them there.

"Excuse me," she remarked, "but they want me upstairs in the private room; and, you know, those gentlemen are exacting. Tip-top people, lords and sirs, friends of the Durga, who can't put up with the cooking at the 'Two Doves'; it appears that they give them nothing to eat but rice down there!"

When she had gone, the watchmaker heaved a little sigh. No—no one had seen *him* down there. Ah, if only it were not he!

"Uncle," sighed Jacques in his turn, "if I had no more hope—I would have paid the penalty long ago. You may, indeed, believe that the only excuse for what I have done was that I have always believed Benedict Masson to be innocent. So—you *understand!* If he could have proved his innocence himself—*after his death!*"

"Be silent! Be silent! I understand. I understand only too well—but Christine! Ah—what have we done? What have we done—oh, my Jacques!" And the old man began to weep. "You see, Jacques, we are cursed. It is not permitted for man to revive that which is dead."

"Then, uncle, let us walk like animals, eyes always fixed on the ground—and browse! But since the day when a forehead has turned toward the heavens, toward light, toward life, I consider that one has not the right to return to the slime. Always higher, oh, Creature, toward thy Creator!

"All religions preach perfection. This effort toward God we shall attain by science. Science has no validity, if it does

not succeed in making a creator of a creature! Then and then only shall we mingle with God! The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—eternal myth of the Holy Trinity! It is the brilliant, dazzling truth for him who does not turn his head.

"It is all pantheism. The creator, the creature, the breath which unites them—all is inseparable. We pass our time in receiving life and in giving it. One transmits it by the flesh—we have given it by the spirit! No, no! Gabriel is not a sacrilege!"

"It is perhaps a crime, and you deserve no less than the funeral pyre for it," stated the watchmaker, brushing away his tears. "All your philosophy will not give us back Christine."

"He will give her back to us if he is innocent."

CHAPTER XIV

Their Supreme Hope

At this moment there was a great commotion on the stairs. The guests of Mother Mouche were coming down, calling to one another gayly with bursts of forced laughter, jokes, hoarse exclamations, in a language that neither the watchmaker nor Jacques Cotentin understood.

They made their appearance and passed through the low-ceilinged hall, their eyes gleaming, faces flushed with the wine they had drunk, smoking enormous cigars, and holding themselves as straight as poles, without bending a knee, walking in an equilibrium a little too correct.

Mother Mouche, to whom they had just paid the bill, followed them with profuse and endless thanks and an admiration which knew no bounds.

"Oh-h! What they can stand, those people!" she said when they had disappeared. "Believe me, they are not on a dry ticket! My bottles are empty! It's not alcohol that scares 'em and with it all they pay royally. And they can! It appears they've got millions! They're lords and sirs, I can tell you!

"And it appears there's one of 'em who was a king in India. The funniest one there is Lord Blackfield. Seems he's been an ambassador in Persia, has that one. They don't look like it—but—they sure can drink! A treat for me after my other boarder who never drank anything—and I won-

dered why he wanted to be served in a private room, that one!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Jacques quickly, as he exchanged a glance with the old watchmaker in which the direst agony was expressed.

"Oh, a funny sort of chap who was here up until five days ago. In the first place he was dumb."

"Ah—"

It is impossible to express all that this "Ah!" which fell from the lips of our two travelers, contained. Let us simply compare it to a dying gasp.

"Yes, a chap who was indeed to be pitied. I should say so! In the first place, if you examined him close, you could see that he was full of 'twitches.' He seemed always ready to fly off. This didn't displease one, it was even rather graceful. He seemed to have the lightness of a bird. For my part, I believe it was his disease that made him like that.

"You often see those *ataxias* who have so much trouble in stretching out their foot. But he! Why, he seemed more as though he was trying to suppress his movements—as though he was afraid he wouldn't be able to stop himself.

"He must have been wounded in the war; and they had patched him up in bits. Gassed! An explosion! A bit of a bomb which had smashed him up. I wondered. Oh, I've seen some 'made-overs' pass by here since the Marne days. He couldn't have been able to talk since he had had his chin taken off!"

"His chin taken off?" stammered Jacques.

"Oh, they had put one on him; and it was well done—I can tell you! But all the lower part of his face formed a block that didn't move—and with that, he had mag-

nificent eyes, so kind and so sad—why, one could have cried only to look at him—or would have fallen in love! Ah, he was a handsome one of his type—one can't deny that in spite of his misery."

"His misery?" muttered the watchmaker.

"For sure! You'd be miserable if you were patched up with another's face, no matter how good it was. Oh, a fine operation; I don't say that it wasn't. They had stuck a face just like a statue on that man. But then to be dumb, eh? He made himself understood with signs, or with little written notes.

"As to being hard up with money, that he certainly was not. He wasn't lacking money, and he liked good things; but he never drank. He made us understand that he drank only water, but the water bottle was always full. He had asked to be served in a private room. I don't think that he wanted anybody to see him eat on account of his artificial chin.

"But he must have had a good appetite, in spite of all. He never left anything. I often look for the bones from a chicken, for instance. Well, he even ate the chicken bones! They had fabricated an iron jaw for him, I guess—unless he carried away the bones for his dog. Perhaps he had an animal where he lived to cheer him up."

"Oh—and he came here all alone?"

"All alone."

"Then—he did not sleep here?"

"No. He must have rented some place on the banks of the river, on the other side of the 'Two Doves.' I think he must have been living alone like a wolf—disgusted to have been smashed up like that in the hey-day of his youth. The last time that he was here, he didn't look pleased. I

don't know what had happened, but he was not good to look upon.

"His eyes that had looked so kind had got wicked! Wicked! And in the private room we heard him walking about—walking about, and banging on the wall! That day he even broke a decanter. I went in then and asked him what was the matter, for, although he was dumb, he wasn't deaf! He didn't answer me; just looked at me.

"His eyes had become sad and gentle again; and I thought he was going to cry—but he was not that kind. He paid me what he owed me and went away. I have not seen him since. It was the evening before that they discovered the body of my poor little Mariette. Surely, I spoke to the police of it when they came! I gave them all the information that I could on him, same as I have on all who've been here for the last three weeks, the last month!

"The police have been looking for him, but I don't think that they have got him; if they had I should have known. He must have left these parts. When one is like that, one can't please anywhere."

"How was he dressed?" asked Jacques in a hollow voice.

"Well—like any one else. An all-one suit, and a gentleman's big overcoat, which didn't suit him at all. It just hung in the back. But he seemed as though he didn't care a hang about his clothes."

Five minutes later, Jacques and old Norbert were on their way.

"That is he," moaned the old man, hanging onto Jacques. "He has come back to the scene of his crime, like the murderer that he is. They can't resist it. Only, in

his case, it continues. And Christine is no longer with him."

"No—but Christine is alive," breathed his nephew.

"Alive! Alive? How do you know?"

"He came to this inn merely to get food which he took to her. Since the food disappeared—what would he have done with it? It certainly was not for himself!"

"That's true—yes, that's true," wailed the watchmaker. "But where has he put Christine?"

"There where she, perhaps, still is."

Old Norbert understood. Both made their way into the thick woods and then went down the hill, at the foot of which was the somber house, shut up like a tomb, on the edge of the pond—the house henceforth celebrated in the annals of crime, the den which the most curious only dared look at from afar, where the satyr of Corbillieres-on-the-water burned his victims, after cutting them into pieces in his cellar. A supreme hope and a supreme terror hastened their steps.

CHAPTER XV

Within the Sinister Abode

THEY jumped over the wall in the rear, which surrounded the little inclosure overrun by dried, frost-laden brambles, and which now was little more than a chaos, since the police had been there, digging and overturning all in an effort to find what might remain of the victims of Benedict Masson.

A pale, cold moon regarded them on their lugubrious expedition, with a look which might have been that of a friendly well wisher. Old Norbert almost broke his leg as he let himself drop into the garden. Near the shed which had served for a sort of woodhouse and washhouse, and which was nothing more now than an outhouse for rubbish, Jacques fell into a hole.

His flesh was torn and scratched; and he had great difficulty in getting out. The dark and gloomy dwelling seemed to endeavor to defend itself against this invasion of its miserable peace, in which the fear of the passer-by had left it—since the police had gone, leaving their seal upon it.

But nothing could have stopped these two. As the door resisted their efforts, with a spade they forced the opening of a double shutter, broke the glass, and entered through a window. Jacques struck a light; and finding a half-burned candle in its candlestick near by, lit it. He was in

the famous kitchen, opposite the famous stove, which some weeks later was to fetch at the public auction an exorbitant price.

No—there was no one here now in this awful abode; but from several signs, the visitors discerned that it had been inhabited a short while since. Where would have been better than here—to hide his last prey? He was very sure that no one would come there to disturb him!

That must have been the first thought of his brain, when coming out of the mortal coma into which the executioner's movement had thrown him. When one awakes, one often takes up the same trend of thought upon which the eyelids have closed—Corbillieres, where Christine had come so imprudently to throw herself, in a way, into his arms!

Then, opening his eyes again, he had found himself face to face with Christine. Quickly he had carried her off, down to this place, perhaps to finish the gory work that he had not had time to accomplish. Old Norbert thought with horror—despite the words of Jacques, meant to be reassuring, which the latter himself, perhaps, did not believe—that such must have been the animating idea of *their* Gabriel.

This flight in the opposite direction of the place he wished to reach, was made with the intention of throwing off all pursuit. Starting from Pontoise, he must have suddenly turned back and returned to Paris, *via* Pierrelaye —since they searched for him in the direction of Isle-Adam or Chars. This flight was a master stroke! It had been conceived with a lucidity which might have filled the surgeon with pride *for his work;* but which made the old watch-

maker's heart beat with terror, as well as with a tragic respect for his nephew!

Could they still have any doubts? The silence, the abandoned state of this house, after the passage of Gabriel, a passing of which they found traces at every step—was not this proof that they had arrived too late? Old Norbert began to strike himself up against the wall like a drunken man. In vain, Jacques cried out to him: "But nothing has yet proved that he has brought her here. Nothing proves that she has not escaped from him."

Alas! They soon had the most sombre proof. As they went onto the first floor and into the bedroom which looked over the yard, they came upon an unimaginable disorder. There, everything was thrown about in a struggle which must have been frightful!

The furniture was all scattered on the floor and near the bed from which the coverings had been snatched off, opposite a mirror, shattered into a thousand bits, they found Christine's house dress, a sort of winter dressing gown, which she had worn when the monster had carried her off so brutally, so ferociously, from her home. The dress was now nothing more than a rag.

Old Norbert gave a cry of despair; then turned on his accomplice and heaped curses upon him. Then, going downstairs, and running like a madman with staggering step through the house, cursing, he disappeared into the night.

Upstairs, Jacques continued his researches. From an overturned table a drawer had fallen out; and near this drawer lay some papers which he picked up—pages covered with Christine's handwriting!

The Agonies of Christine

THEY were bits of crumpled paper, stained, spotted, on which she had written in pencil some hasty notes when she thought that she had a few moments alone. One can imagine the feverish hurry with which the surgeon pounced upon these meager slips, classified them, according to the date, and sometimes there was the simple indication of the day of the week and the hours, too. Eagerly, Jacques read:

"He was at my side when I woke up in this strange room. He was watching over me with ferocious hostility. His looks froze me. Jacques, Jacques, if ever you read these lines, know that I forgive you. I am as guilty as you! And papa also is guilty!

"Alas! I feel well that I am going to pay for us all. For he will not forgive us! Think: that in a great measure I helped to send him you know where—to the gates of the cemetery at Melun—where you did not wholly let him enter!

"Oh—horror! He had a right to everlasting rest after the frightful penalty. And we snatched him from the great peace of the earth—to make of him a *subject of living experiment!*

"Yes—that is our crime; your crime, Jacques; and ours, also; but we shall be punished for it, and before long.

"I read it in his eyes, as in a book!

"He who adored me—he has nothing but hatred for me in his eyes—I see.

"And also the firm will to drag me about with him, in a catastrophe from which this time he will not return!

"His eyes scorch me; his motionless mask which I made with my own hands so that he should be beautiful, terrifies me, as would the face of a jinni, sculptured in the marble of the tomb, whose heavy eyelids are raised suddenly to fix on me a look which consumes me.

"His beautiful eyebrows are two formidable bows, the arrows of which make my heart bleed.

"I have not the strength to act. I do not know what fatal languor is flowing in my veins. I am letting myself fall into the depths of my destiny as into the depths of an abyss of which I shall never see the bottom.

"I feel exhausted like poor Anne Elizabeth, whose life was taken by the monster—and I have not the strength to call for help.

"Jacques, I confide my last thought to you; I ask nothing more than to die, since you have put the soul of a murderer in the child of my dream!

"My dream doll! My dream doll! I have put in you my breath, my reason and my soul!

"And you, Jacques, what did you put in him?

"You put in my death!

"No! No! I do not want to die! I do not want to die! I am at Corbillieres! I do not want him to do with me what he has done with the others!

"I do not want to have little Annie's fate! Help! Help! I also am shrieking for help, Jacques! But you will arrive

too late—as with the victim of the last of the Coulterays! And I know where my tomb will be!

"I have seen what Benedict Masson did with the remains of little Annie! You know where you will have to search for my ashes!

"He has gone out. I have tried to escape, but one cannot escape from this room. Those who have passed through here knew something about that. They knew some things.

"The window which looks over the garden has iron bars; and the door is of an unshakable strength.

"He only takes you down from here when he leads you to the cellar. This is the last stage before—before—what I have seen. I am going mad! *Mon Dieu,* have pity on me!

"Is it just an idea? But—when he left me just now, his eyes seemed less fierce.

"I hear his steps—on the stairs.

"Oh—I am afraid! I am afraid!

"He came in. He had a bowl of hot broth in his hands. He offered it to me. His eyes begged me to take it. His eyes were kind and sad.

"He only speaks to me with his eyes. He is dumb, but he can make signs to me. A dumb person has a hundred ways to make himself understood. And he is satisfied to look at me, and that is all. He could write to me. You know that he has all that is needed for writing. We put all that was necessary in his pocket with his keys.

"He seems to have a knowledge of a lot of things. He knows how to use his keys, the keys that we put in his pocket. I have the proof of that. Yesterday I heard a particular noise of cogged wheels, followed by a frightful tinkling of keys; and I was afraid that he was entering.

"But I did not see him in the night.

"And this morning his eyes are sad.

"Has the danger passed?

"One can never be sure of anything with such a personage. Do you know of whom I think when I find myself in his presence? Of the monk, Schwartz, the Benedictine, who invented the powder; and who, after a first conflagration, always feared to see his mixture explode.

"I also have the constant fear that Gabriel will explode! *A radioactive serum has made of it a Thing, all the consequences of which you, perhaps, have not weighed!*

"Without considering, you have put in the skull the brain of the man from Corbillieres—and you have unleashed a tempestuous fury which has carried me off and dragged me to this spot.

"He is going out! He is going to get my food. He is sad because I do not eat—or eat so little! Sometimes I watch him through the slats in the shutters. He leaves the house—which happens usually between five and six o'clock in the evening, when it is already night. He evidently goes for the provisions; I wait ten minutes, and then begin to shriek out like a mad woman in the hope that some one will hear me.

"But who could hear me?

"No one dares pass by here when night falls. Ah! We are well guarded by Fear!

"Yesterday I heard again the noise of the clock winding —still followed by this terrifying tinkling of the keys and of the awful snapping of his shutter—you know what I mean, Jacques—then I informed myself. I know that his regard has descended to the depths of the interior abyss.

"When it comes up from there, after having seen what he has seen through his shutter, I am always afraid that my end has come.

"But, perhaps, he also dreads that, for at least this man has loved me with an untamed, wild heart—he did not enter. He only let me hear the dance of the little keys outside my door, and then he went away.

"I told you that he had a knowledge of many things. I am convinced that at the time of the last and supreme experiment when we believed that the first nervous reactions would not be manifested before the second week at the earliest—he had already heard!

"Then, while we stood around him, we talked among ourselves without any embarrassment, because there was no outward sign to warn us that he had begun to come out of his coma. But, although he could not make any movement, his brain heard. Already, thanks to our imprudence, he knew.

"He heard the remarks when, like a professor giving a demonstration on a patient under an anæsthetic, you leaned over him.

"Only he was already in a conscious state; and he heard you close the shutter.

"And he heard the little keys rattling.

"And he knew what the little keys were used for.

"Where will he end? This situation cannot last. What is he plotting? He is digging all the time now in the garden.

"Through the slats of the shutters . . . I saw him pass with some tools . . . a pickax—a shovel.

"I can hear him digging up the earth!

"Oh, I am afraid! I am afraid!

"*He does not burn them any more!* The fire can be seen from a distance. *There can be no more smoke in Benedict Masson's chimney.*

"So he digs up the earth!

"This dance of the keys is infernal. It would prevent me from sleeping if I could sleep.

"At the moment when I expect it the least, or when I drowse in an animal torpor, it suddenly strikes on my ears and fills me with a renewed terror!

"He knows it. Certainly he knows it. And I know what he means when he shakes his keys, the noise of which precedes him on the stairs like a demon's laughter.

"Yes! Yes! I have spoken of the dance of the keys, but it is of their laugh, their burst of laughter, that one must be afraid!

"They replace the frightful laughs that he is unable to have, but which he certainly would have if he were able to laugh, after delving down with a glance from his eye—one glance only—into the depth of his interior gulf.

"The keys seem to say to me: 'You know, also, what there is in the depth of this chasm! *There is nothing of my mechanism that you do not know!*' And they seem to shriek with laughter!

"And they go away; they go down—they go off in the distance. It is nothing but a lamentable little tinkling of nothing at all.

"To-day his eyes are sadder than ever; his movements are calm and slow; his attitude is quite—quite dejected.

He seems to me very slow to move himself . . . and I hope! . . . I hope!

"Ah—to have expected so much from his first movement! But now I have but one hope . . . that he will return to his nothingness. Do you remember what you said, Jacques? What you feared then? That the suture—stitching—was made too quickly? Because, after the first reactions, you had a glimpse of—as a result—a too rapid depression. Merciful Heavens! May this not be an illusion! He is slowing down! He is slowing down!

"Jacques! Jacques! Jacques! He only slowed down in order to be able to spring better! Jacques! Jacques! Jacques! The frightful machine is reawakened!

"It is no longer Gabriel! It is not even Benedict Masson! It is a horrible whirlwind!

"It is an unexpected force of nature which we have unleashed!

"It is a cyclone!

"It has crushed me—torn me!

"He is coming back! No! No! He shall not take me down there! I don't want to go down! I know what he did with the others down there! Down there—in the slaughter house!

"But I have no more strength! I have no more strength! I am already nothing but a wound—"

CHAPTER XVII

Benedict Masson Lives

The emotion caused by the continuation of the crimes at Corbillieres increased. Public opinion was aroused. Forgetting, naturally, that it had been the first to demand that Benedict Masson should be put to death, it now accused the sûreté, the magistracy, the court and the jury, of having, as usual, acted lightly, without definite proofs!

The poor bookbinder—this is how he was spoken of in the sensational columns of divers newspapers—had certainly been the victim of a frightful plot. They did not say what plot; but, since the crimes continued, there could be no doubt as to his innocence.

Various writers on opposing sides of the question and the different angles of it attacked—and demolished, to their own satisfaction—each other in the sundry papers; ferocious polemics appeared in even usually staid editorial pages.

Justice was being defended—and was attacking! The journals got an interview with the Keeper of the Seals on the case. They made a great deal regarding a statement given out by the Procureur of the Republic:

"That the crimes at Corbillieres continue," said this official, "does not prove anything in Benedict Masson's favor. It simply demonstrates that Benedict Masson has had one or two imitators, that is all! It is not the first time

that an epidemic of this order has manifested itself in a country where minds have been able to find, in some way, an example for imitation in certain events!"

"Well, if he has imitators, find them," was the retort to the procureur.

"Ah, you may well believe that we are looking intensively for them."

We would say that the nerves of the Sûreté Generale detectives were on edge. As to M. Bessieres, their chief, it was already rumored that there was a question of replacing him. So we leave to your imagination whether he was pleased or not when his clerk announced to him, the morning we visited his offices, that a caller wished to see him to make some revelations of the greatest importance regarding the crimes at Corbillieres.

"Show him in!" he cried.

And at the same time he pressed a button of a bell that was placed under his desk. While the person announced was being introduced, the secretary came in and took his place at a little table where all the materials for writing were, when a typewriter was not desirable. M. Bessieres, after having made a discreet sign to his assistant, examined the newcomer.

He was an old man, very nervous, excited, and rather swollen looking. He regarded the chief of the sûreté with haggard eyes. M. Bessieres thought at once that he might be a lunatic. But the visitor appeared to be of sane mind, despite his agitation, when he declared all in one breath:

"*Monsieur,* you can be tranquil. The law has not condemned an innocent man. There is a reason why the crimes at Corbillieres are continuing; and I am about the only one to know this reason, alas!"

"Well, then, my dear sir, you must tell it to me. Be good enough to be seated."

"Thank you. I cannot remain seated. If you knew, *monsieur,* the atrocious night I have spent—".

"You tell me that presently; but now, for the moment—"

"All—I will tell you all. All the truth. You must know—the world must know—"

"The reason why the crimes at Corbillieres continue," specified the sûreté chief, who dreaded nothing as much as having informants lose themselves in personal or other details apart from the subject at hand.

The old man bent toward M. Bessieres, or, rather, pushed close to him a face, whereon the intense emotion of a disordered soul was displayed; and his mouth uttered:

"The crimes at Corbillieres continue, sir, because Benedict Masson is not dead!"

The world is a theatre, life a play—often a tragedy; and the humans therein more or less clever actors, hissed or applauded, but always burning with a desire to attract the attention of their contemporaries.

One would never suspect the influence that certain big judicial cases exercise on minds which, until that time, had passed for being well balanced. Chance has put them in the "case"; they want to shine in the first row. What would they not invent to make more of their small parts; give greater glare to their testimonies?

M. Bessieres had been too long in this game not to be on his guard for such. All the same, though one may be accustomed to being surprised at nothing, he did not expect this sort of a revelation. Evidently, it was an explanation! The crimes at Corbillieres were continuing because

Benedict Masson was not dead—their executed criminal was not dead.

"So you have discovered that," he commented to the excited old man.

"Yes, *monsieur,*" he replied, appearing more and more worked up. "I will tell you presently what I have discovered."

"Well, I'll tell you beforehand," said the official, "you could not have found out anything better. Just imagine! Think it over a little, my dear sir. By the way, you have not yet told me your name; but it is a formality which my secretary will attend to later. Now, then, this is where we are: Benedict Masson is not dead, but he has been guillotined!"

"No, sir!"

"What! He has not been guillotined?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then he is dead?"

"No, sir; no, sir; no, sir. Let me explain. Don't go, sir. Don't take me for a madman! Listen to me! You will know all! And you will give me back my daughter!"

"*Monsieur,* I have not the honor of knowing her! And I have a very important engagement. But here is a gentleman who is, as they say, like my other self; to whom you will give your name, first names and standing; and who will refuse you nothing that can be agreeable to you."

"My daughter, *monsieur!*"

"He will give her back to you. We will refuse you nothing." Thereupon M. Bessieres, who had made a certain sign to his pseudo-secretary, seemed in a hurry to leave the visitor for a *tête-à-tête* with his "other self."

Now is the moment to make the acquaintance of this latter personage who played his part on the side scenes of the Masson case, side scenes which the public powers have since voluntarily left in the sombre shadows.

This detective had been known in all branches of the police service for more than twenty years; in the Secret Service headquarters, sub-offices, the Prefecture, and even in the provincial branch, under the name of the "Emissary." His real name was Lebouc—le bouc: the goat—it was not a miserable pun, but a story. This is how Lebouc came to be dubbed "the Emissary goat."

The term had originated at a certain affair, the taking place of which had somewhat upset the official world. To keep watch over a particular personage whose actions were suspected to be ominous, but not to infringe upon them, there was needed an agent whose intelligence and courage could be relied upon, and, furthermore, whose disposition would stand a disclaimer, should events take a disquieting turn for those at whose instigation he was sent.

Lebouc had come early before the police. Yet he had not the vulgar soul of a common rogue, rather that of an irresolute beginner. After his third experience of *the life*, which had brought him before official attention, he had come to the conclusion that, if he wished to amount to anything, he had chosen the wrong road. Tired of being among those arrested, he went over to the side of those who arrested; from being a rascal, he became a stool pigeon.

Remaking the Dead

M. Lebouc had distinguished himself at once. He was no longer the rascally dog, or the stupid sheep. He had ideas in general, and had received some education. In several affairs of importance, he had turned in reports to those who had employed him which were remarkable, as much for their detective divinings as for the literary form, which he knew well how to impart. And in addition he had courage.

In the case of which we have just made mention, the authorities had chosen Lebouc, which filled him with pride. He had brought his mission successfully to a close, and had received the commendations of his chiefs. The personage observed proved to be still more powerful than guilty; and his friends had taken every means in their power to put him in the best light.

So Lebouc had been sacrificed. He had accepted his defeat with a resignation which everybody behind him had credited to his account.

The Sûreté Générale had dispensed with his services for a time, but whenever delicate operations presented themselves on the order of that wherein he had gained himself such a high reputation in police circles, they communicated with Lebouc and utilized him under another name. One alone was current between him and officialdom—the Emissary.

M. Bessieres had had occasion, in the course of his brilliant career, to appreciate the qualities of the Emissary; his intelligence, his discretion, and above all, the smiling facility with which he had always let himself be disowned. But this is more than is necessary to explain the presence in the offices of the Sûreté Générale of a man who, formerly, would have been "the pearl" of the Prefecture.

M. Lebouc remained for more than an hour with this species of madman whom M. Bessieres had handed over to him with a sign to get rid of him as quickly as possible. During this time the Chief of the Sûreté Générale had gone down by the interior passage which connected his offices with those of the Minister of the Interior, to see that official, who happened to have with him just then the Keeper of the Seals.

All that was talked of there was the affair that occupied the attention of all Paris: that at Corbillieres. The seance was heated. When M. Bessieres returned to his own quarters again he met M. Lebouc, and asked:

"Well, did you get rid of that madman?"

"He has just gone," replied the detective, "but he will be back."

"What! He is coming back?"

"Yes. At six o'clock."

"Ah! You're joking."

"You know very well, chief, that I never joke! This man, perhaps, is mad, but I am not sure of it. It is my system! In our business, chief, one can be sure of nothing! In any case, it was interesting to hear him. This excited old man is neither more nor less than the watchmaker in the Street of the Holy Sacrament, old man Norbert, whose daughter was found in the little house at Corbillieres."

"Well?"

"Ah—well. Well! It is hard to say—he is a funny old man, whom I have already had to occupy myself with at the time of the Benedict Masson case. He is interested in a very extraordinary mechanical problem. He has invented a sort of escapement of square wheels—well, how can I describe it? His colleagues say that for some years he has been searching for the secret of perpetual motion."

"He looks as though he were," commented the Chief of the Sûreté dryly.

"Yes."

"And then—"

"And then—he says—he pretends—"

"What?"

"I shall have to tell you again, chief. This is the uncle of a certain Jacques Cotentin, who is considered a genius at the School of Medicine. He is the surgeon down there. It appears that he is, also, something out of the ordinary. But I telephoned, so as to be more sure."

"To whom did you telephone?"

"I telephoned to Professor Thuillier."

"Why?"

"To find out—to know what to think of the surgeon."

"Well—what are you driving at?"

"Professor Thuillier told me that he holds Jacques Cotentin in the highest esteem; that he considers him as one of the future glories of surgery, and as the continuer of Carol and the Rockefeller Institute people. You know them?"

"Yes. Carol, Rockefeller—known to perform wonderful works in the professions."

"Well, then, chief, it appears that Jacques Cotentin makes over the dead!"

"What do you want to bring that up for? Are you, also, 'wandering'?"

"No, chief—not before you have found me a place to go to. But you still have to know one thing."

"Speak out—or leave me in peace."

"I wanted to be sure on this detail."

"What detail?"

"Oh, a detail that has its importance. You know that the faculty, after the execution of Benedict Masson, claimed his head?"

"Yes. That is their customary privilege."

"But you do not know where they carried the head?"

"To the school."

"No. To the watchmaker's."

"To the watchmaker's? What does a watchmaker want?"

"Excuse me, but the surgeon lives with the watchmaker."

"Ah—yes."

"So listen: it is all very extraordinary. I won't contradict you on that. But, on principle, I always listen, because, on principle, I am never sure of anything. Well, this is what the old man told to me. He has fabricated an automaton."

"An automaton?"

"Yes—an automaton. Don't look at me like that, chief, or I shall never have the courage to continue."

"Oh, continue, Lebouc. I'm not looking at you."

"But you'll continue to listen to me?"

"Yes—to give you pleasure. Now, come, out with your story. The madman has invented an automaton?"

"Yes. An automaton which the surgeon has furnished with an interior gear tissue of nerves."

"What! Nerves! Violin strings?"

"No! No! Nerves! Real human nerves!"

"Are you ill? How do they live—those nerves?"

"Well—they soak in a liquid or serum, which is used to keep alive the tissues indefinitely. And which, besides, has been subjected to the action of radium!"

"You impress me, Lebouc. And then—"

"And then—it is very simple! All that was needed for their machine was a brain! And they stuck Benedict Masson's to it!"

We cannot render adequately the effect produced by these statements on M. Bessieres's state of mind; though there might be used thereon an expression common enough in all police circles, understood by all, from the top to the bottom of the organizations—though its origin was in doubt: the Chief of the Sûreté Générale was like "two dabs of dough." Then, when he had got his breath, he pronounced:

"It is you who will have to be shut away, my friend."

"Perhaps."

"Oh, surely."

"Well, I have always done what one wanted. Meanwhile, the crimes at Corbillieres continue."

"And don't I know that damned well? Go down stairs and tell them this fable about the old man's Puppet—if that could cheer them up! The Premier and the Keeper of the Seals can't be handled with pincers! I have just had to submit to a little grilling; and during that time I see that you were not being bored here! No—but look here, Emis-

sary—are you making fun of me? You told that crazy old chap to come back here at six o'clock?"

"Yes—on account of his daughter. For—do you know—it is a fact—they have kidnaped his daughter from him!"

"Who—they?"

"Well, then: the Puppet!"

"His automaton has stolen his daughter?"

"He says so! Keep cool, chief—there is nothing to be mad about. One can only be bewildered—as I am—or make a joke of it. After all—if you wish, we'll change the subject."

"There! There, Lebouc. Perhaps you are right. One should always listen to children and fools, although there are no bigger liars in the world! But it is sometimes sufficient for a word to put one on the right trail. I listen to you!"

"No—it is not me you are listening to; it's the old man—this is what he tells:

"Benedict Masson, as one knows from the trial, was in love with his daughter, Christine. The surgeon, needing a brain to put in his automaton, and not having found anything better, slipped in the one which they had brought him from Melun, which was Benedict Masson's; and this was the result—which, in the main, was logical enough. The first movement of the automaton, as soon as he gave signs of life, was to carry off Christine—it appears that he rushed about like a wild creature."

"I'm not laughing, Lebouc; I'm not laughing. But I feel that I shall become tired out to hear you relate to me seriously such things!"

"I am speaking seriously to you, chief, because, for a long time, nothing has made me laugh any more; and,

again, there is a certain detail which is of quite some importance. Before running off with Christine, the automaton left word on the table—a note that the old man brought here—here it is. It is not much that he has written: 'I am innocent.' "

"Bravo! There at least is a fixed idea, or my name is not what it is!"

"Chief, we have other papers which belonged to Benedict Masson on which he had written, 'I am innocent.' I've had the notes brought here that were at Melun, since the Corbillieres case, which we thought so deeply buried. It has sprung out of the ground again, as one might say. Here they are! Look! Compare them!"

"Now, Lebouc, even in admitting that this is the same handwriting—which remains to be shown—you are not going to make me believe that this paper does not date from before his death. Lebouc, you will have to make a retreat, my friend."

"Yes, chief, once more, once less."

"Say! Are you making fun of me?"

"Couldn't afford to, chief."

"You have only one way to make me forget your jokes, which are in bad taste. You will go off to Corbillieres. I will give you full power. Perhaps, after all, Benedict Masson was innocent. So much the worse for the gentlemen of the law. I don't care a hang, anyway, for this job. You ferret out the guilty ones for me, and don't be afraid. I'm here to back you up, Lebouc."

"Oh, as to that, chief, I can count thoroughly on you."

"You can! Who's that coming in here? Come in."

CHAPTER XIX

The Proof of Guilt

A CLERK entered with a mysterious air, and said in a low voice:

"Chief, it's a man who won't give his name, and who has asked me to give you this message from M. Gassier, the attorney general." M. Bessieres broke the seal quickly, and read:

MY DEAR CHIEF:

I send you one of our friends regarding the Corbillieres case. He will tell you some interesting things. Listen to him to the end. M. Lavieuville is sane in body and mind.

"Well, here's something for us! What an odd recommendation!" observed the Chief of the Sûreté, as he threw the note on the Emissary's desk.

"Ah!" exclaimed Lebouc. "It's Lavieuville! The watchmaker did speak of a Lavieuville!"

"Show him in," instructed his superior.

A man with a dubious expression on his face, shivering with cold in a second-hand overcoat, his shoes smeared with mud and snow, entered through the doorway; his mien was humble, his shoulders bent, his eyes narrowed.

"Gentlemen," he began, "I must ask pardon for appear-

ing before you in this state, but since they stole my little automobile—"

"Sit down, sir. The attorney general has sent you to me."

"Yes. If he had not I would never have dared to come to you. I must ask you to show the greatest discretion. It is a question of life or death! *Monsieur,* I am M. Lavieuville, churchwarden at the Saint Louis church. I have a little automobile."

"Excuse me, *monsieur,* the attorney general says you wish to speak to me in reference to the Corbillieres affair."

"Exactly, M. Director. We are coming to it! My automobile was stolen by Benedict Masson!"

"Then it is an old story; and I think it is a little late to reclaim it from him."

"Eh, *monsieur.* It is not such an old story as all that! It dates only eight days back!"

"But you forget that Benedict Masson was executed more than three weeks ago."

"That is why I have come to see you, *monsieur.* What has happened to me is unimaginable; and, if it had not been for the attorney general, to whom I related everything—proofs in hand—I never would have dared, I repeat, to come to you."

The Chief of the Sûreté threw up his hands; then he dropped down into a chair, where he took his head between his hands—a prey to a mad fury, which he, however, managed to control. Glaring ferociously at his caller, he said briefly:

"Speak, *monsieur.* I'm listening."

"Well, *monsieur,* I must tell you that I have a charwoman: Mme. Langlois!"

"Good—Mme. Langlois."

"Who goes sometimes of an evening to take her camomile at Mlle. Barescat's, the haberdasher's."

"Mlle. Barescat—perfect."

"In company with our chair renter, Mme. Camus, and the herborist, M. Birouste."

"Mme. Camus—M. Birouste. You are not forgetting any one?"

"*Monsieur,* I was not at that friendly little gathering at Mlle. Barescat's."

"Then why do you tell me about it?"

"Because it has the greatest importance to what I am going to tell you. Mme. Langlois, my charwoman, is very ill, *monsieur!*"

"Believe me, *monsieur,* I am very sorry to hear it."

"It is all the more regrettable tha if she had been in better health she would have accompanied me here. Mlle. Barescat and Mme. Camus—they are better; but they are afraid to shoulder their share of the responsibility, and they don't dare leave their homes. As to M. Birouste, he has not left his bed since that frightful adventure."

"What adventure are you speaking about—yours or theirs?"

"It is the same, *monsieur;* only it had two acts. The first act took place at Mlle. Barescat's, during the camomile tea. I must tell you that Mme. Langlois used to do the cleaning for Benedict Masson."

"And he didn't murder her?"

"Not yet, *monsieur;* but in the course of events, that might happen any day. That is why I am here, *monsieur;* and why the attorney general—"

"The attorney general is having a joke on you, *monsieur;* and I don't understand—"

"I don't think the attorney general is having a joke on me," interrupted M. Lavieuville, quite unmoved, "and if you don't understand, M. Director, it's because you are not listening to me! I am coming back to the candle at Mlle. Barescat's—Mme. Langlois, who did the cleaning for Benedict Masson, also does it for that old fellow Norbert, the watchmaker."

"Then that brave lady does the cleaning for the whole island?"

"No, *monsieur,* but she knows pretty well what goes on in all the houses, and it is very instructive to listen to her —in the case which interests us, she was telling the ladies about a sort of personage who lived secretly in the watchmaker's home, and who she thought was a soldier, mutilated in the war.

"The nephew of old man Norbert, Jacques Cotentin, the surgeon, who's a genius, so the attorney general tells me, was looking after this so-called mutilated one. So—don't be astonished at anything, *monsieur*—well, this so-called mutilated one, on the last information, was merely an automaton!"

M. Bessieres jumped as though he were an automaton himself, obeying some secret spring.

"Merely!" he exclaimed. "And what do you understand by this last information?"

"That which has been furnished to me by my friend, M. Gassier, the attorney general, to whom I related my adventure and who made a personal investigation from which he himself deducted that we had every chance to have an affair with an automaton!"

"Ah—really? These gentlemen of the magistracy of the

Seine have been conducting their own little investigations, too," reflected M. Bessieres aloud, sitting down again with a queer smile.

"They don't hide it from you, *monsieur,* because it was they who, officially, if I dare express it so, advised me to come to you!"

"Yes—yes—continue, dear M. Lavieuville; you are beginning to be interesting. Decidedly these gentlemen of the law have a party spirit, and are practicing solidarity! But I should never have imagined—"

"I continue—the evening of the camomile, it was then that these very ladies were speaking among themselves of this individual. The door was opened, and what was their terror in seeing this mysterious person appear, carrying Mlle. Christine all covered with blood in his arms. She had fainted. I do not paint the scene for you. You will question Mme. Langlois.

"You must understand, it was there that this species of monster mechanic gave first aid to his captive, which her condition necessitated—and he escaped again without having uttered a word."

"So! The automaton does not speak then?"

"No, *monsieur,* he does not speak, but he hears very well."

"That's comforting."

"M. Birouste, the herborist, went back to his home terrified! He found the dreadful creature there—still attending to Christine Norbert! More frightened than ever, our herborist escaped by the window. And it happened that at that same hour—that was about half past six in the morning—I came out of the Saint Louis church, where I had been attending the divine service.

"I was getting ready to get up into my little car, when the said person tripped me up, threw his victim into my car, stripped me of my outer clothing and, at the same time, fifteen thousand francs, which were in my pocketbook. Then he threw me his own cloak and started my car. He disappeared up the left bank of the river.

"The attorney general, M. Gassier, has learned since that the car took the road to Pontoise—there they lost track of it. But before disappearing, the bandit had stopped at Flottard's, the restaurant keeper's, upon whom he made I don't know what sort of an attack!

"Flottard, in self-defense, stuck an enormous kitchen knife into the fellow—but the person in question did not even appear to notice it! Take note of this, M. Director, *he did not even bleed!*

"Now, on the other hand, M. Gassier had just gotten particular information, authentic information, bearing upon certain works of the watchmaker and the surgeon, who employed an assistant from the laboratory named Baptiste. This Baptiste was questioned, and finally made to speak by threats of the law; from him M. Gassier got this idea that there could be, as I have told you just now, an automaton."

"Understood! Oh, I have understood, M. Churchwarden. You can even say to the attorney general that I have had no difficulty in understanding! But what has Benedict Masson to do in this?"

"Why, sir—after the execution they carried Benedict Masson's head to the young surgeon!"

"I know! I know, M. Churchwarden!"

"My name is Lavieuville—M. Lavieuville."

"M. Churchwarden Lavieuville, I know all that you are

going to tell me—another th g that you can repeat to the attorney general. You are g ıg to tell me that the surgeon put Benedict Masson's ain, while quite warm, into the automaton's skull."

"Yes, *monsieur*. You have got it! It's frightful!"

Thereupon, M. Bessieres got up; he no longer took the matter lightly. He gave a formidable bang of his fist on the desk, causing the churchwarden to jump. "So you would have *me* believe that *you* believe that!"

"We have the proofs in our hands," countered the other, a little pale, and prudently taking a step back.

"Who—we?"

"Oh, excuse me—*me*—for nothing in the world would the attorney general mix up in this affair!"

"Oh, I can quite believe that! He doesn't want to—does he?"

"He only occupied himself with it through his friendship for me; but his official position—"

"I understand. He can be tranquil. But tell him for me that it is not the Sûreté Générale who are going to take it upon themselves to launch such a story on the world. So, then you have proofs, my dear M. Lavieuville?"

"Yes, *monsieur*. Here they are."

"Ah, yes. And in Benedict Masson's handwriting, naturally!"

"*Monsieur*, you guess everything! It is, indeed, in Benedict Masson's handwriting that the mysterious person traced these lines under the terrified eyes of Mlle. Barescat, Mme. Camus, Mme. Langlois and M. Birouste, after the execution of Benedict Masson: 'If you value your life, be silent!' And here are other little phrases, written the same evening, or, rather, the same night, a few hours be-

fore the attack which concerns me, by the same person for M. Birouste's reading.

"And, finally, here is the affidavit of three sworn experts to whom the attorney general submitted these papers and, at the same time, the papers in Benedict Masson's hand produced at the trial. They all three concluded that there could be no doubt about it; that it is the same handwriting; and that it is the same brain that has written them!"

It was M. Bessieres's turn now to turn a little pale; his brows were drawn, his lips were twitching. "Will you leave these papers with me, sir?" he said.

"I see no reason why I should not," replied M. Lavieuville, "since I know that the attorney general has had photographs taken of them." And as M. Bessieres was silent and remained standing, he understood that the interview was over. "I will also leave you my address, *monsieur*, if, by any chance, you should need me—"

"Oh—you will hear from us," the chief responded. "It is the least we can do to try to give you back your car and your fifteen thousand francs."

M. Lavieuville bowed and departed, hiding under a forced smile the discontent that he felt at his reception. He had expected anything but this chilling sarcasm, behind which he perceived a particularly hostile thought.

The Threshold of Oblivion

THE door was no sooner closed upon the churchwarden than M. Bessieres burst out:

"I'm certainly not going to stand for that!" He took a step toward Lebouc, who up till then had not made a move from his desk, over which he remained bent. "No! They shan't catch me! I'll sling you my job first, Lebouc! All this is nothing but a frame-up by the magistrates. They all stand together and are ready to throw themselves into the most absurd affair to save Themis's face. It is always the same story.

"We know it. It is not so very long ago that we saw a gentleman of high standing, but of elementary cunning, don a skirt, a veil and a pair of spectacles and set out to probe the mysteries of an affair in which great principles were at stake. The Puppet does not date from yesterday.

"In his naïve stupidity that man with the veil thought that he could get by unnoticed. Gassier, behind his automaton, is an imbecile! He says that the Puppet is dumb. That's not true. It shouts out: 'Don't touch the great State bodies! Don't touch the Law! Don't touch the bridges and the pavements! Don't touch—' and during this time they are sacrificing us—the police!"

"Yes, *monsieur*," agreed Lebouc.

"They make us dance like a jack-in-the-box. These gen-

tlemen do wrong to invent an automaton. Isn't it enough for them to pull our strings? Well, I've had enough of it! You heard him, that churchwarden, whom the attorney general sent here. It is all in this, Lebouc: *The law cannot condemn an innocent man.* Now get that well into your head. *The law cannot condemn an innocent man!*"

"No, *monsieur.*"

"This does happen, and it is none of my business! I do what I can. I gather the facts, and the law has to take its responsibilities. Well, then it is going to shoulder this one! That I swear! The sûreté is not going to take upon itself to resurrect Benedict Masson. They have experts—let them produce them themselves! Isn't that so, Lebouc?"

"Yes, chief."

"But you, Lebouc, what do you think of all this?"

"I think," replied the inspector, "that the very best thing to do is to question, as quickly as possible, the surgeon, this Jacques Cotentin, who, according to Professor Thuillier, can restore to life—indefinitely—tissues, nerves and even brains with this serum of his."

"Still a joker."

"This is not the opinion of Professor Thuillier."

"After all you are right, Lebouc. It is the simplest way. Try and find this man. Get him as quickly as you can and bring him here to me!"

"Chief, there is every possibility that I shall find him at Corbillieres."

"How's that?"

"Well, the entrance of that churchwarden, and also it must be said, the state of mind in which you were, made it quite impossible for me to give you the final statements, which are somewhat extravagant, of the old watchmaker."

"You are modest in your qualifications, Lebouc."

"My system, chief, is not to judge by words, but to retain facts. Well, one fact which this excited old man stated has impressed me. Their researches led the young surgeon and the old watchmaker to Corbillieres. There they forced an entrance into the abode of Benedict Masson and found the most terrible traces of the Puppet. They found the blood-smeared dressing gown of poor Christine Norbert. They have not been able to find her, neither have they found the first victims of Benedict Masson."

"And you did not tell me that, Lebouc?"

"Chief, my system is to proceed in order."

"And the surgeon? Where is he? I want to see that man at once!"

"The watchmaker said that he left him down there—in the very depths of despair, for it seems that this man loves Christine Norbert as fully as much as his Puppet!"

"As much as the Puppet?"

"I should say—as much as Benedict Masson himself loved her."

"Lebouc, my friend, if you do not want me to go suddenly mad, jump into a car, run to Corbillieres and bring back that surgeon, at no matter what cost—by fair means or foul!"

"Very good, chief! I'll remind you that the watchmaker, who has returned to his home on the Isle Saint Louis, while awaiting your orders, is to be back here at six o'clock."

"This evening at six o'clock! Don't worry about that! I will send for him at once! Now go! And, remember, not a word about this!"

"Well—what do you think, chief? It's understood!"

"Not a line in the newspapers before I get some light on the subject!"

"Chief, you can count on my discretion!"

So the Emissary went off. M. Bessieres, with beads of perspiration standing out on his features, his limbs limp, sank into a chair; his head dropped on his shoulder, and his eyes rolled around in their orbits.

A fatalistic figure he presented, with the air, despairing and stunned, that a bull has at the slaughterhouse, after the first blow of the mallet, which has not quite deprived him of life, but has, nevertheless, put him on the threshold of oblivion.

CHAPTER XXI

The Gory Puppet

It was under this heading, "The Gory Puppet," that the newspaper, the *Epoch*, published the next morning in the first column an article which had the effect of producing a stupor upon the readers of this journal, which generally was considered a quite conservative organ, and information within which was reproduced frequently in the press of the whole world.

This heading was followed by sensational subheads announcing an unheard of event, not only unlikely, but something that surpassed all that the wildest imagination was capable of inventing in the realm of science and crime.

At the same time, in a separate editorial "box" on the front page, the newspaper took the precaution of putting its readers on guard against the shocks of the first reports, advising them to wait until the services of the general press could prove, or disprove, this initial information, before it was accepted as entirely accurate or indicative as to the facts. This journal, it was declared, was merely publishing the account as a matter of pure information.

The published story confined itself to narrating in all the details the events which had taken place the previous day in the offices of the Sûreté Générale, the conversations which had been held there, and the statements made—all

this, indeed, in a manner as exact as a phonograph might have reproduced it.

And so the readers experienced as many divers emotions as we have seen agitated M. Bessieres and, like that worthy official, became completely bewildered.

This astounding article was signed merely with the enigmatic initials: "XXX," and was followed by secondary comment from the editors—N. D. L. R.—still evidently anxious to allay any insinuations that they were implicated in any hoax; but they also undertook to enter upon general considerations of the subject, to prepare the way and philosophize upon this latest novelty of newsdom.

Did not one dwell in an age of miracles, when one should not be astonished at anything, when one has seen the most extravagant conceptions of the poets and the novelists crystallize?

"In this report, which (ran the editorial observation) was handed in to us too late last night for us to undertake our own investigation, we might, perhaps, have seen only a revived sort of story of the most ingenious type of Heinrich Heine, had not the standing of the party furnishing it, as well as the location of its scene at the Sûreté Générale, persuaded us to publish it, though making our own reservations.

"As to those of our readers who lean toward literature anyway, and who would have preferred to see this unusual article among our 'Oddities' essays, they will lose nothing of its uniqueness where it is, for imagination equivalent to that of the author of 'Reisebilder' is appealing anywhere.

"One cannot do better at this sort of thing on paper. Readers familiar with those narratives will find here more

than one point of contact with the awful automaton of the Street of the Holy Sacrament.

" 'It is related,' wrote Heinrich Heine, 'that an English mechanic who had already invented the most ingenious machines took it into his head to construct a man, and that he succeeded. His hands could function like those of a man; in his leather chest he carried a kind of apparatus that enabled him to utter articulated sounds, so he was capable of conducting conversations! This Gory Puppet does not speak, but it writes—with blood!

" 'In short, this automaton turned out to be quite an accomplished individual and to be altogether a human; he lacked only a soul. But this soul his creator could not convey to him; and the poor creature, coming to the consciousness of his imperfection, tormented his creator day and night with solicitations for a soul.

" 'This appeal, which each day became more ardent, ended by being so unbearable to the poor mechanic that he ran away to get rid of his troublesome treasure. But the machine man took up the trail, and pursued his producer all over the continent, catching up with him now and then and growling in his ears, *Give me a soul!*'

"Such was the story of Heinrich Heine," continued the editor's comment.

"M. Jacques Cotentin, surgeon of the School of Medicine at Paris—we give all the names so that in this extraordinary story each one is obliged to shoulder his responsibilities, and so that, if it is anything else but a story, we cannot be suspected of having served the interests of any one who has been involved, closely or remotely, in the very alarming episodes of Benedict Masson—M. Jacques Coten-

tin, he who gave a soul at the same time as a brain to his Puppet, was not chased by his automaton—it was he who pursued it.

"Has he caught up with it? After having found the bloodstained garments of his sweetheart, will he be able, at last, to arrest the automaton, now turned assassin, which he has imposed upon the world?"

This query was what was perplexing, nay perturbing, M. Bessieres's aids that night.

We can state something more; that is, that this affair was no longer treated like a yarn or a hoax by the authorities. At the very moment when this edition of the *Epoch* is going to press the inspectors of the Sûreté Générale are wondering whether the surgeon himself is not a victim of his own invention.

In truth, at the sinister little house in Corbillieres, where old Norbert had last seen Jacques Cotentin, the authorities had found no trace of him, neither there nor elsewhere; no more than they found any trace of Benedict Masson's first victims, nor of Christine Norbert, nor of the diabolical automaton itself.

CHAPTER XXII

The Voice of Science

It was on a Sunday morning that the *Epoch* article appeared. What a Sunday for the inhabitants of the Saint Louis Isle! There was an incessant invasion of inquisitive outsiders—snooping savages! In truth, one had never seen such a rush upon the place since the siege of the city by the Northmen! That, perhaps, is going far back, but where and how was one to find terms of comparison?

From eleven o'clock the crowds engulfed the Street of the Holy Sacrament, shook the watchmaker's door, overran M. Birouste's shop, and stormed Mlle. Barescat's place. It should be explained that Paris, since the early hours of the morning, had been inundated with special editions.

Once the first stupor had passed, the readers were able to look without laughing; they had thought, or pretended to think, that the matter had been a gigantic joke—something new in the sea serpent story.

But at nine o'clock the *Epoch* had rushed out its second edition, in which it put clearly to the fore the situation at the Sûreté Générale—and M. Bessieres in the depths of desperation!

He wondered dully who could have been the traitor who had given such exact information to a newspaper—which had so often been hostile to him.

He strongly suspected the attorney general, M. Gassier,

whose interest it was to unleash some sort of a scandal, the effect of which would be to afford evidence of justification of the course of the law in the former Benedict Masson case.

The magistracy must have made the churchwarden and even the watchmaker march along a chalk line of its own marking. It was more logical to suspect the Emissary, but the Emissary had never, in his official capacity, evinced the slightest obnoxiousness toward the authorities. On the contrary, he had voluntarily taken many annoyances and embarrassments upon himself. There was no reason for him to change his habits.

But the disclosures did not stop. In the special nine o'clock issue the *Epoch* published in full not only the proceedings of the previous day at the Sûreté Générale, but also a summary of the late events in the offices of the commissary of the district involved; that is, there were reproduced the declarations of Mlle. Barescat, Mme. Langlois, Mme. Camus, and M. Birouste, as well as the extraordinary story of M. Lavieuville.

In addition, a reporter of the *Epoch* had gone to Pontoise and interviewed M. Flottard, who had described how his new Chatellerault knife had entered into this living model as into a stuffed figure. Another investigator had supplied the statement of the garage man, where the Puppet had briefly halted.

The chief of the information bureau himself had gone to Corbillieres, had visited the evil abode on the outskirts, and then interviewed Mme. Mouche of the Green Tree. He revealed to the agreeable hostess that her late strange boarder was neither more nor less than an automatic assassin who had inherited the brain of Benedict Masson, but the genial

lady had only laughed, for, as we know, she had laughed at everything since the death of her husband.

At ten o'clock another special edition published an interview with Baptiste, the attendant at the laboratories, who worked for Jacques Cotentin.

Baptiste readily admitted that it was indeed he who had carried the head of Benedict Masson to the Street of the Holy Sacrament.

All the facts, bewildering though they were, tallied so accurately that one ceased to laugh, and, furthermore, all the newspapers, at the same time, began to give them out.

It was a riot of paper—specials—more specials with headlines which made one grow dizzy. Such as this:

LOOK OUT FOR THE MACHINE TO ASSASSINATE THE WORLD!

And here was something that could not be denied: the police were taking the matter seriously. They had already examined the victims of the Gory Puppet. They were searching for others. Every detective from the Sûreté was on its trail. And the result of this was: a stroll around the Isle of Saint Louis.

If the Republican Guard had not suddenly appeared upon the scene to drive the crowd back beyond the bridges, and the central brigade of police had not put up the strongest barricades, one could not tell what deplorable accidents would have taken place.

M. Lavieuville, M. Birouste, Mlle. Barescat, Mme. Camus, and Mme. Langlois had taken refuge in the church belfry.

As to the watchmaker, one never saw him. It was learned since that he had been secreted in the home of a celebrated

practitioner, a professor at the school of medicine, who had always had great friendship for Jacques Cotentin—that is, M. Thuillier, one of the most open-minded at the school, the chief of those that were always referred to as "the juniors," who were at open war with their dean, Professor Ditte, one of the old glories of the institute.

All the afternoon the crowds, attired in their best, were hurrying in the direction of the Isle of Saint Louis. There were parties in all the cabarets from the Bastille to the Hotel de Ville, from the wine markets to the Saint Michel Square.

To comprehend completely the scope and spontaneity of the excitement it should be borne in mind that this bomb of the model-monster burst upon a ground already prepared for fire and flames. There had been talk of nothing else but the last crimes at Corbillieres. The guilt, or innocence, of Benedict Masson, an issue just ventilated with vehemence, had given place to the most heated discussions about the diabolical Puppet—was it *it?*

At six o'clock in the evening a final edition of the *Epoch* came out to offer a new element in the case for the public's eager assimilation. For the first time the voice of science was making itself audible, and what a voice—that of Professor Thuillier himself.

A Living Machine

THE reporter of the *Epoch* found the distinguished scientist in his home, surrounded by a veritable tribunal, which had certainly met together here for no other purpose than to discuss the question of the day, namely, the dreadful Puppet.

The reporter was introduced to Drs. Pinet, Terriere, Gayrard, Hurand, and Pasquette, all friends and admirers of Jacques Cotentin, and all more or less familiar with his works. Here, summarized, are the statements of Professor Thuillier:

"It is unfortunate that in the exceptional circumstances in which we find ourselves we cannot hear Jacques Cotentin himself. We should know at once how to act; and we should not ignore any detail of this famous Puppet, which, I plainly see, has made Paris and the suburbs delirious.

"In default of our surgeon's presence I have been able to have a long talk with M. Norbert, who also is a savant, that is to say, is gifted with a scientific mind. I have also questioned a helper at their laboratory named Baptiste, an individual who is not as stupid as he looks.

"If we could only put our hands on the notebook in which Jacques Cotentin jotted down his observations from day to day, and which would, of course, contain all the

details of his living automaton, he would not have to speak; the work would explain and defend itself.

"But we have neither the notebook, which the surgeon always carried on his person, nor him, nor his automaton —at least, for the present. So, with reservations, then, I will tell you some things, some observations, after having interrogated the two persons mentioned who have been associated with his works, after having myself visited the laboratory where the man-machine came from, seen the apparatus which were used to fabricate it, and, also, after having picked up some scattered papers on which, in the hurry of the last moments which had preceded the phenomenon of life in the Puppet, the surgeon had scribbled some ideas or, rather, impressions.

"I am pleased to give these statements to the press in the presence of my eminent colleagues, who are in the same state of mind as myself—purely scientific. Will you kindly understand that we cannot prevent ourselves from considering the phenomenon, that is, the possibility of its actuality, for, at the point where our inquest is resting, we could not view it otherwise."

"He certainly might have chosen another brain than the one he did use," spoke out Dr. Hurand.

"Gentlemen, let us remain in the scientific sphere," begged Dr. Pinet in a dry, metallic voice.

"Gentlemen," commenced Dr. Gayrard, "it is not bad that in this interview the press sees not only savants in us, but also men susceptible of emotion in the face of a public disaster."

Then, suddenly, all were quiet, a little ashamed of having interrupted their host and leader, who was saying nothing.

It was the reporter's opportunity to render his obeisance:

"My dear sir, I beg of you—Paris—France—the whole world—listens to you."

"*Monsieur,* that which I have to say is so grave, so significant, and may determine against us such a storm of objections that my dear colleagues must be pardoned if they exhibit some agitation.

"And, now, let us return to Jacques Cotentin, who has one of the greatest minds that I know. From a scientific point of view, it is the idea of universal preservation which has always guided him. In other words, it is the tenacious hope of finding perpetual movement, not, certainly under the naïve form of creation of eneregy of all allied parts, but, as Bernard Bruhnes expressed it—without believing it —under the most refining of restored useful energy, which has inspired his first works.

"In the moment when he was going to find the defect, the principle of the degradation of energy, he was struck with certain results that had been obtained on the other side of the Atlantic, methods of treating the tissues which seemed to preserve them almost indefinitely.

"It was then that the idea came to him, since he had not been able to vanquish death in general, to try to triumph over it in particular. If he was not yet able to create life—he would try with living tissues taken from the dead to create a living being—a man—even a superman!

"This dream, in which all the ardor of his genius has lately been concentrated, he would, perhaps, not have been able to work out if he had not had the coöperation of this old watchmaker, who also pursued the same idea in the realm of mechanics.

"It seems this old man had fabricated, with his daugh-

ter's aid, an automaton which was already a marvel, and which they had been able to give such a human resemblance, such a natural movement, that certain ones who had seen it were deceived and had taken it for a real person.

"As this personage had emerged—so far as looks went—from the hands of Mlle. Norbert, as beautiful as an angel (those were her father's words), she had christened him Gabriel! But it was merely an automaton—in short, a mechanical model.

"There had already been constructed masterpieces of such a species. We leave to one side the legends and fables of antiquity that there is no evidential information upon, and go to the seventeenth century for the first really authentic automatons.

"Descartes put together an automaton to which he gave the face of a young girl, and which he called his daughter Francine. On a sea voyage the captain had the curiosity to open the case in which Francine was inclosed; but, surprised at the movement of this machine, which seemed as though it were supernatural, he threw it overboard, fearing that it was an instrument of magic.

"Ravarol relates in the notes of his 'Discourses of the Universality of the French Language' that Abbot Mical constructed two brass heads which pronounced clearly entire phrases. The government not having wished to buy them from him, the unfortunate artist, overwhelmed with debts, destroyed them, and died in poverty in 1786.

"We have also the three automatons due to the genius of Vaucanson, who published a description of them in the current reviews of 1738, and which raised to the highest pitch the admiration of the public. They were of a flute player, a tambourine player, and an artificial duck.

"I will not enter into the details of the interior movements which made these automatons of life act through the medium of steel springs, little chains, and the repercussions of valves and levers—marvels which were submitted to a committee of the Academy of Science, who could only 'bow' before the genius of the inventor.

"Vaucanson, also, constructed an organ grinder, an old woman, which was in the collections at the Conservatory of Arts and Industries. At the end of the last century, Frederic de Knauss exhibited an 'Androide writer' at Vienna, which still exists. I can cite other examples, more recent, but I stop here. That is enough to understand to what length mechanical art can go when its object is to imitate the human movement.

"But to be able to make them act, these creators must wind up their machines. The master stroke of old man Norbert was to call in the aid of electricity in such a manner that to guide his automaton there was only need to make him talk.

"Imagine he had placed in the drum of each of Gabriel's ears a very sensitive pellicle, or membrane, provided in the center with a needle which came in contact with an electric apparatus, which would determine such and such a movement according as the needle prolonged the contact more or less, which occurred when one addressed to him certain words or phrases in either ear. In short, when one talked to Gabriel he telephoned him, and Gabriel obeyed.

"Although so perfected was this automaton, old man Norbert was far from being satisfied. As to his daughter, she simply raved about it. It was she who had given it its magnificent form and its handsome face. She had even dressed the Puppet up in a romantic fashion. She looked

upon him almost as a mother, and yet he was her ideal.

"One day, when something happened to be out of order, old Norbert declared that the young sculptress was to blame for it, and he made her promise that she would not touch it again unless he were there. She gave the desired promise, but she did not keep it, for the old man, going into her studio one evening, found her holding the automaton in her arms just like a child who was ill.

" 'Ah, I understand now why he never obeys me!' he cried.

"And then, in one of those fits of despair, which only an inventor can know, he smashed his life's work. The daughter was distraught. She begged him to show mercy to Gabriel as if he were a human being.

" 'Do not kill him—do not kill him!' she cried.

"But this Gabriel was then nothing more than the corpse of an automaton, and here is where Jacques Cotentin comes in.

"Wishing to console his cousin and his uncle, who already regretted, the one the rash act and the other the fact that she had made the act necessary—he decided to revive Gabriel, but no longer as a simple mechanical model which obeyed the workings of springs, but as a man.

"Besides, for some time the surgeon had been nourishing this thought; the work upon which these two geniuses had launched themselves in order to realize their creation—uniting the mechanical deftness with the physiological science being beyond anything that could be imagined, why could not he help them to do what even their imaginations had not conceived.

"He thought of what other seekers after the marvelous

had achieved, whose objects had been far more restricted than those of this old man and this young girl. Life is a mystery of which one must not despair the solution. We think that it has escaped us forever when we still hold it in our hands.

"On the tenth of September, last year, Dr. Bedford Russell used direct friction on the heart of a man who had been dead for several days, and as a result they were able to bring back to life a young fellow who had succumbed to an infectious quinsy. In order to accomplish this miracle the surgeon had had to make a deep incision over the patient's heart, and with his hand keep up a continual massage for several hours on the ventricles laid bare.

"If this could be done with a heart," reasoned Jacques, "why have doubts in regard to a brain, to which again one might give vascular circulation. That is to say—life!"

"Just how did Jacques Cotentin give this necessary circulation to an automaton, and how did the brain act on the automaton?" asked the reporter.

"Here, sir, is the system, as I understand it. After making my investigations, which necessarily were restricted, and also from what the watchmaker tells me—the brain was the culmination of the work; in short, when the brain arrived, all was ready.

"The pieces of the automaton were recovered with nerve tissue necessary to transmit the movement; and with the artificial vertebral column, from which I have been able to collect some remains of apophyses—a process of bone—which was its marrow—the whole was prepared and kept alive in a serum.

"A system of wicks were wadded, if I might express it

so, and slipped under the skin. The skin was artificial, and, as far as I am able to judge after examining the residue, was made from a kind of velvety parchment, extremely supple and soft.

"All these wicks were moistened with this serum which preserved the life of the tissues and kept up an even temperature under the soft skin. We now will touch on the problem of circulation and how Jacques Cotentin resolved it.

"The circulation of the serum would be established by the interrupter of a siphon. This serum would pass through a tube, slipped in a 'resistance' making a continual temperature of thirty-seven degrees by an interrupter. The cleansing of the serum in circulation was accomplished by a 'dabbling' which recalls the 'dabbling' by lime.

"It is simple, sir, and it is also formidable—the work of a genius—and when I tell you that our inventors have submitted the serum to a special radium treatment—or better still, the residue of radium—which caused the ruin of the unfortunate ones who gave their last fifty thousand francs for fifty milligrams of radium foam—and that the automaton could draw on a superhuman strength, and that it could see and hear like you and me—but that it did not speak—the inventors for the time being have refrained from giving him a voice which might make him ridiculous.

"And with that I shall have told you all that I know, have seen or have surmised.

"Until we can put our hands on this mechanism, and on the notes of Jacques Cotentin, it will be useless to say more."

Thereupon the professor got up.

"But just one more word," said the reporter. "Can you

explain why Jacques Cotentin should choose Benedict Masson's brain?"

"He did not choose it, sir," replied the professor. "Benedict Masson's brain was ready at the psychological moment. And they tell me that our surgeon believed in the bookbinder's innocence—although I do not think that this had anything to do with his decision to use the brain for the purpose.

"I simply think that he used this brain because he considered that it was perfect—without damage—in no way exhausted—like most of the brains that he would find on the experimental tables. It is not often that one can secure a brain which is just taken from the body.

"And—one more detail. Benedict Masson died courageously—his head thrown forward, and the head in such a position that the knife did not mutilate it. This helped a great deal when it came to putting together different parts of the creation; it assisted to make the suture of the nerves easier. I must ask my colleagues to forgive me if I speak in this simple and untechnical language."

"In short, professor," said the reporter, who was now all eagerness to be off, "the Gory Puppet does exist?"

"It is quite possible that it exists—yes."

"And these gentlemen are of the same opinion."

They all bowed.

The reporter thanked the celebrated practitioner, and went toward the door, accompanied by Dr. Pasquette.

"You have said nothing, doctor," said the reporter. "What is your private opinion? On your conscience, what do you think of it all?"

"On my conscience, I think that it is most comical."

"Oh, you do not think it possible?"

"I think that it is possible, but I tell you on my conscience that I consider it most comical."

"It is frightful!" cried the reporter.

"We are of the same opinion, M. le Journalist. It is frightfully comical."

CHAPTER XXIV

Assassinating the World

One can imagine the effect produced by the statement of such a kind issued by so high an authority. The majority of those who were still skeptical, despite the array of facts, of the existence of the Puppet, finally gave in.

The *Epoch* issued a special edition of hundreds of thousands, in which the interview with Professor Thuillier was published.

The people snatched at it, read it aloud to each other in the cafés—the other big dailies reproduced it, attracting, in spite of the intense cold, such a crowd in front of the bulletin boards that the traffic was completely stopped.

"The Gory Puppet—the Gory Puppet!" One heard nothing but that. A machine to assassinate the world, which was running wild on the roads—a diabolical machine which might claim one as its victim at any moment, but against which one could do nothing, because it had been stabbed with a knife, and that knife had had no more effect on the thing than if it had been given a caress—and, of course, that showed that it was also bullet proof.

What did they not hear? A gun could be discharged at it without having so much effect as a scratch. The bullets would penetrate it; and as to the vital parts, the siphon, the tube, the "resistance," the dabbling—all the mechanism which the professor had spoken of—well, one can imagine

that that must have been protected by something like a steel plate. The populace were so wrought up through the consideration of all this danger, of this menace, that they declared that Jacques Cotentin deserved the scaffold more than Benedict Masson had.

This was the state of mind of the public when, at ten o'clock of the evening a special edition of the *Quarter Hour,* a newspaper at open war with the *Epoch,* published in response to the interview of the professor, the statement of the dean of the School of Medicine, Professor Ditte, member of the institute, that all the premises of the interview were wrong—that, in fact, the Gory Puppet was an impossibility.

Then the discussions were taken up again with eagerness and violence.

"How does he know that it is impossible? He has proven nothing," cried the partisans of Thuillier; "he has seen nothing and heard nothing. It is all speculation on his part. He has made no investigations. He has questioned no one. That old beard! He's been at Raspail all the time. Why, old Thiers did not believe in the railroad either. Your dean is the biggest imbecile there is!"

"Yes, and your Thuillier is the greatest idiot there is," they retorted.

Bang! Bang! Blows, fights—broken glasses!

"This is what they wanted," said an old gentleman who had taken refuge in a quiet corner, as far from the fight as possible. "We must remember that we are going through a difficult moment," he said. "There are clouds on the horizon—there is nothing left of our alliance with England but a dim memory—and especially we must consider the agitated state of mind that the public is in.

"I have remarked during my long life, that when the country is agitated, the government finds nothing better to calm it than to give it a dose of terror. I can cite many instances. At the time of the war in 1870, I was old enough to understand then, and I remember that famous Troppmann affair. Why, gentlemen, Troppmann, the murderer, never existed!"

"He didn't, did he? Well, what about the Langlois Fields?"

"A field, gentlemen, can always exist, but Troppmann was an invention of the Emperor, the same as your fiendish Puppet, is an invention of the chief of the Sûreté Générale. I am merely giving you my opinion—you are not obliged to share it. When you reach my age there will be lots of things that will not astonish you."

The old gentleman who had thus spoken in a café on the Boulevard Poissonniere was M. Thibault, an independent gentleman of modest means, living at Batignolles.

Another Victim

But all this emotion which we have just described in regard to this sensational affair was nothing in comparison to what was to happen in the following days. It was like a wave of madness sweeping over the city of Paris.

It will be a long time before that fantastic week will be forgotten. That week which began with the discovery of the little surgical instrument and its "trocar."

We have not forgotten that on Christine's first visit to Corbillieres she had this fatal instrument in her handbag and that it had disappeared. An inspector of the Secret Service found it on the steps leading from the house of the Bluebeard of Corbillieres, two days after the affair of the Gory Puppet broke out.

And that the reader can appreciate the importance of such a sensational discovery, we cannot do better than reproduce here the semiofficial report from the press.

"The police have just made a sensational discovery at Corbillieres. The instrument with which Benedict Masson touched his victims before strangling them, has been found. It is a little automatic pistol provided with a trocar, constructed somewhat on the model of those used by surgeons, which can be seen in the show cases of the specialists in the street of the School of Medicine.

"This trocar is a hollow needle into which the man of

Corbillieres introduced before shooting off the pistol, a few drops of a narcotic poison. This was then shot out at the unsuspecting victim. That is all we can say for the moment. The expert chemists have not stated the exact composition of the poison, but there is no doubt that it was a powerful one.

"The use of this explains why Father Violette made no struggle when he was murdered—he was a sturdy fellow and would have fought. He was in every respect a better man physically than the little bookbinder of the Street of the Holy Sacrament."

In this manner the strange pricks on the arms and necks and thighs of those who met death at Corbillieres were explained.

The police had been much puzzled at the repetition of these pricks and had been able to give no explanation for them. Now they had an explanation to their hand. Benedict Masson had pricked them and thus inoculated them with poison before he actually murdered them.

A communication which did not appear in all its importance until some hours later was soon to have a thundering reverberation on the Parisian population when the *Epoch* in its two o'clock edition continued the same text.

"Further communications from Corbillieres state that there is now no doubt that the pricks on the later victims here were made in the same way as those on Father Violette and that all were made by the trocar on the pistol found there.

"So—the Gory Puppet had the same weapon as the one which was used by Benedict Masson!

"Singularly, this corroborates the opinion of Professor Thuillier. The day is not far off, perhaps, when we shall

find the bodies of Christine Norbert and the surgeon, bearing the same marks, the little fatal speck which indicates the passage of the monster.

"And now—how came the little pistol to be on the steps? Evidently it was lost at this particular spot. Otherwise the formidable Gabriel would still possess it. But, alas, there is also another hypothesis which the police consider more likely—that is, that Benedict had several of these weapons hidden in an unsuspected corner of his house and that the Puppet did not require this one to continue his work of death. The *pistolette au trocar* which the detectives have now found might have been lost by Masson before his crimes were discovered.

"But be that as it may, the Gory Puppet is armed!"

A shudder passed over Paris. The Puppet could prick from a distance, and one could not resist him. This was what science had been leading up to, the people cried. There is too much science, said they.

The most conservative papers printed articles on old Paris, wherein they regretted the passing of the coaches and the highway robbers. At least one could take precaution in those days and one knew what one was risking. But you try to get out of the way of a gentleman dressed the same as you and I, with an honest face, but who has a little pistol in his coat pocket. It's different.

For if you are in a dense crowd, he'll get at you and you won't know what has happened. You'll feel something, like a sting, a prick. You think to yourself that you have been stung and you don't attach much importance to it and you walk on. Before long a little giddiness is felt.

A stranger approaches and offers assistance. Then there is a body falling to the ground, that body is dead—robbed

—strangled, perhaps. And no one knows how it is done, or exactly what the gentleman does with his victims. All the corpses that Benedict Masson made have not been found, especially the women.

Something happened on the day following the one on which these articles were printed that completely turned the people's heads, for it seemed to suggest that the assassin was abroad there—on the streets—in the stores.

A young lady went into a department store to buy a pair of gloves—six and a quarter. Suddenly she uttered a cry, put her hand to her hip and moaned: "Oh, I've been stung!"

She looked about her, but the indifferent crowd was passing on, so she said again, louder:

"I've been stung! Some one has stung me!"

Then they rushed forward. The head of the department, with the anxious crowd at his heels, led the young lady, staggering, to the door of the rest room, where she remained with a woman employee for some moments. Then the woman came out again and said loudly to the attentive head of the department:

"Quick! A taxi!"

And this woman had red hands!

The excitement was intense. There was only one cry.

"The Puppet! The Puppet!"

CHAPTER XXVI

The Peril of Death

THERE were some persons in the store who were overcome with fear, who left quickly, but the curiosity of others was stronger than their terror.

They lingered to see the injured lady—who was very pale—come out. She was supported and seemed about to faint again. She was put into a taxi and accompanied to her home by two of the store's detectives. A policeman who had been called in, mounted the box.

This incident, which was published in the evening papers, made an incredible commotion. Now there was every evidence that the Puppet was in Paris. He would have to be somewhere. The moment that they could not find him in the provinces, they felt sure that he had taken refuge in the capital. Where could he pass unnoticed better than in Paris itself?

The *Quarter Hour* challenged the police to arrest the Puppet. He existed, or he did not? If he existed, then it was up to the police to get him.

But all were now of the opinion that the Puppet did, indeed, exist, and every one thought that it was their duty to arrest it. Another press notice about the young lady who had been pricked, stated that she had received this little wound by the most ordinary accident, but this was not received favorably.

The Parisians had reason to be distrustful. The matter was now getting so serious that the police began to fear the consequences. Even if the accident had been less simple than what the Secret Service gave out, it was the duty of M. Bessieres, the chief, to first of all calm the people. But as we have said, all efforts were in vain.

The next day another young and beautiful person of Polish blood—we can be exact because we have the records before our eyes—had gone into Trinity Church to offer her devotions when, suddenly, she sprang up from her prayer stool as though galvanized into action, for she also had been pricked. She gave a scream of terror and pain which attracted the attention of the sacristan. At the same time a little swing door near her softly closed as though the perpetrator of the attack had just escaped.

The sacristan rushed forward to the aid of the young woman, who begged him not to leave her for a moment. "I feel that I am falling asleep," she moaned.

He had just time to catch her in his arms. It was in this attitude that the first vicar caught him. Of course he had to give an explanation. Then they both led the young lady of Polish origin into the vestry and the police were telephoned for.

The first thing that the police did was to try to keep this matter quiet, but a telephone girl who had heard the message had nothing more important to do than relate the story—by telephone—to a few friends and acquaintances. A few hours later all Paris knew it.

The Puppet respected nothing and no one. He was everywhere. First the big stores—then the churches—after the churches, the trolleys and auto buses.

That same day at five o'clock Mme. Sarah Tricoche, who

made baby shoes and lived at Saint Maur, had taken a place, in company with her little son, in the Saint Fargeau Louvre bus, going in the direction of Saint Denis. She sat down on a bench of the first class on the first seat in the first row.

She placed her little son beside her. On the bench opposite a gentleman, well dressed and seemingly most correct, was sitting alone.

Suddenly Mme. Tricoche leaned down to put a parcel she was going to deliver, under the bench, when she felt a sharp pain on the wrist.

Without losing her self-control she seized the hand of the gentleman opposite who had also leaned down at the same time and screamed out:

"You've pricked me!"

In support of her statement she exhibited a tiny, dark wound on her hand.

As one can well imagine, her scream caused quite a commotion among the occupants of the bus. The gentleman pulled his hand sharply from her grasp and hotly protested his innocence, while several of the passengers, among whom was a detective, surrounded him and took him into custody.

He was searched immediately, but no instrument whatever was found upon him and a thorough search was made on the floor, but nothing suspicious was discovered. Yet the scratch that the victim carried on her hand vouched for the fact that she was not the mere victim of an hallucination.

Then it was that another passenger declared that a few minutes before she had noticed a strange looking man on the platform. His overcoat collar was turned up to his face,

which was as impassive and hard as that of a statue, and this individual seemed to have in his hand something that might have been an instrument.

That was enough. "It's the Gory Puppet, the Gory Puppet!" cried twenty voices.

"Where did he get off?" asked the detective.

"When *madame* screamed I instinctively turned my head," was the reply, "and he was no longer there, but I saw him on the pavement running in the direction of the boulevards. A big black overcoat, which came down to his heels, flapped around him, and his hat was pulled right down to his ears."

The bus was stopped. The detective had already dashed off in the direction indicated. Then ten other passengers jumped off and took after him. On the crowd came, pushing over all that stood in their way and dragging in their wake all those who had nothing else to do.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"The Puppet! The Puppet!"

And they ran!

After a hard run in which the crowd had turned, first one way and then another, because some loiterer, after having learned the cause of all the commotion, told them that he had "just seen him pass," they finally arrived at the Fralin Museum. The door under the archway, which was plunged into obscurity in the shadow, stood wide open.

Who does not know the Fralin Museum?

It was the amazement of our childhood days and the joy of our ripe age.

The iron door opened into this mysterious den, where in

wax there stood the representations of the most famous characters of history, lifelike figures which seemed to lack only speech and gesture.

"Perhaps he has gone in there," cried a voice.

"Why not?" exclaimed another. "Could an automaton be in a better hiding place than among wax figures?"

This assertion was crushing in its logic.

The thirty persons who happened to hear it let the others run ahead, but they turned in at the archway, or rather dashed in, pushing the attendants aside and jumping over the turnstiles. They arrived out of breath and somewhat bewildered in the first Hall of Illusions.

A touch of humor was added to the moment by the fact that a good-natured father of a family had taxed his ingenuity to sit motionless on one of the benches and was trying to create the illusion that he was one of the figures, in the hope of having a good joke on those who would accept the imposition and at the same time of amusing his little family, who was watching at a distance.

Suddenly he sprang up as though worked by a spring and then he passed about the worst quarter of an hour that he had spent in his life. He was subjected to the most dreadful treatment by the infuriated mob.

Then, fortunately, some one happened to remark that the Puppet could not speak. It was this statement which saved him from being lynched in due form. But the unfortunate man was none the less battered when, at last, they handed him back to his weeping children.

He left the museum, swearing that he would never put foot inside the place again and he took the train back to his home in Angoulême that same evening.

Despite the heroic efforts of the attendants to save their

properties, the frantic mob inspected them, every one of the figures, shaking them and probing them until there was nothing much but the frames left. We will not dwell upon this deplorable havoc, which was merely an incident in the general turmoil which had Paris in its grip.

Let us merely say that in the basement, where the scenes of the Revolution are exhibited, there was the worst havoc, for, unfortunately, some of the historical personages were dressed the same as Gabriel was supposed to be when he appeared for the first time at the shop in the Street of the Holy Sacrament, in a costume which was well known from its repeated descriptions in the papers.

These figures were reduced to atoms by these new iconoclasts. And what would these wild creatures have left of this delightful familiar spot, the joy of our Sabbaths, if the police had not interfered?

On the streets the men who were wearing long overcoats and brown felt hats ran the risk of being lynched. What grotesque scenes which, in a moment, might be changed to tragedy! A movement that was a little peculiar, of the most inoffensive person, was the signal for an assault and then, if you did not make any movement—if there was some immobility about you—you were in even greater danger. You ran the risk of being lynched.

It was a case of keeping your wits about you—be on your guard! A sudden drowsiness might prove fatal.

A gentleman on a car who fell asleep and did not happen to even breathe perceptibly, was suddenly shaken wildly awake by the excited passengers, who shook him like a blanket, shouting at him:

"Speak! Speak!"

"What do you want me to say?" begged the poor man, utterly terrified.

"Nothing—that's enough."

All the same it was a dangerous thing to take "forty winks."

CHAPTER XXVII

A City in Hysteria

In the following days this pricking affair took on fantastic proportions.

There were ten, twenty, thirty—even fifty pricks between eleven o'clock in the morning and seven o'clock at night on one day. They usually occurred in the big stores at the busiest hour, when the crowd was pressed one against another around the bargain counters. It became a malady, an epidemic. Women cried that they were pricked when they were not. But they thought that they were, which in its way was very serious, for the hysteria of a whole city is a dangerous thing.

"Enough of this!" cried the prefect of police, who was a man of remarkable intelligence. "This has got to end."

And this is how the police did put an end to it—or almost.

As it was impossible for them to arrest the pricker or the prickers, they arrested the pricked.

We have already had occasion to speak of M. Thibault—the gentleman of modest means living at Batignolles—who had caused quite a little scandal in a café on the grand boulevards by declaring that the Gory Puppet was nothing but an invention of the government, intended to distract the people's minds from international problems that were getting serious. Well, it happened that this M. Thibault,

although he lived at Batignolles, came every day to the boulevards to take his *aperitif*.

"Yes, I am one of the last of the old boulevardiers," he would say frankly.

Well, as we were saying, he was on his way to take his *aperitif* when, as he was passing a big department store, whose pavements were crowded by a feminine clientele, lured there by a sale of silk stockings, he stopped for a moment to contemplate a sight. Perhaps he was wrong to speak out loud—a remark which had a certain spiciness.

He was immediately punished for his innocent criticism, which had been addressed to the vanity of the fair customers. He had slipped in among the ladies and, with the good humor of an old Parisian dandy, he had given utterance to his little joke when, suddenly, he had the disagreeable feeling that a needle had entered deeply into the most fleshy part of his person. He uttered a cry and, putting his hand on the part attacked, suddenly wheeled around in time to see a vague form disappearing around the corner of the street. He called for help immediately.

"Help! Help!" he cried. "I'm pricked!"

A policeman dashed into the throng at once. M. Thibault was arrested.

"Yes, old chap, you're pricked all right," said the representative of law and order; "it's more than a prick—come on!"

At first M. Thibault did not know what they wished him to do, but he began to get some idea when they reached the station house. While waiting for the commissary, he was thrown into a foul-smelling room, which already had several occupants.

"But, gentlemen," he protested, utterly bewildered, "I

am suffering. I swear to you that I have been pricked. I only wish to be examined."

"Oh, yes, you've been pricked all right," growled one of the representatives of public force, pushing the face of an energetic warrior with a fierce mustache up against the poor little man.

"You dare say again that you've been pricked!"

"But, sir, I have been pricked!"

"Well, then, take that! Does that prick?"

And the representative of law and order sent M. Thibault, an independent gentleman, a caressing blow of his fist between the eyes, which sent the poor man rolling on the bench.

Then the door was closed.

A half an hour later it opened.

"The man who has been pricked!" called out a police officer.

M. Thibault, who had scarcely recovered from his emotion, went forward. The policeman led him into the presence of the commissary. He threw a glance at the prisoner —a veritable *á la Fouquier-Tinville* look.

"First and second name—business," he said briefly.

"Aurelien Thibault, independent, Batignolles."

"Well, sir, if I am to believe my agent's report, it appears that you have been pricked?"

"Oh, no, that's a mistake, M. Commissioner, quite a mistake—I thought so. I quite believed it—but now I can swear to you—I can swear to you, sir, that I have not been pricked."

Then the commissioner arose. He no longer had his Fouquier-Tinville look: the most amiable smile wreathed his full lips—full blown like a flower.

"I believe, my dear M. Aurelien, you have understood," he said suavely.

"Yes, M. Commissioner, I have understood."

"You are a remarkably intelligent man, my dear M. Aurelien, allow me to shake hands with you."

"You are too amiable, M. Commissioner—now may I go?"

"Oh, no! No, M. Aurelien. We shall have to detain you another twenty-four hours. I am sure that a man as intelligent as you will understand that it is necessary for the others to understand also. We shall be obliged to lock you up for twenty-four hours. When the others learn that it will cost them twenty-four hours in a cell, if they are pricked, or think that they have been, believe me, no one will be pricked!"

M. Thibault offered no protest. But he no longer believed in the justice of his country, nor in that which comprised the moral force of an independent gentleman. He believed in nothing—nothing, but the Puppet.

As we have already said, this method had excellent results, and M. Bessieres, although the initiative had been taken by his colleagues at the Prefecture, was the first one to rejoice. He was still chuckling over it when he saw a man whom he had sent on a mission appear at headquarters.

"Ah, here you are, emissary," he cried in delight, for on that day no pricks at all had been reported. "Well, whatever became of you? I thought that the Puppet had gobbled you up."

"The Gory Puppet does not eat," said Lebouc, in such a serious voice that M. Bessieres stopped smiling at once; "besides I have not come here, chief, to talk to you about the Puppet."

"So much the better, Lebouc; so much the better. The less we talk about it the better. He has already stopped pricking people. In fifteen days there will be no question about it; another affair will burst out and that will be buried. And let me tell you, I shall not be sorry."

"Chief, the affair which I have to report to you is as grave as anything we have imagined."

"But I haven't imagined anything! Go and tell that to the attorney general and the minister of justice."

"Chief, I have been in Corbillieres all this time."

"Corbillieres! But no one saw you there! I have asked news from all my officers and inspectors who are there."

"Well, I was there."

Lebouc got up and made sure that the doors were closed, then returned to his chief's side and spoke to him in a very low voice for some time.

M. Bessieres at first swore, then abused, then he was silent and listened. Folding his arms on his heaving chest, he finally burst out:

"It is not possible! It is not possible!"

Lebouc, a little pale, now was silent.

The chief seized his inspector's hands as though he would crush them.

"Listen, emissary, you are not a fool! Well, you must keep quiet. Do nothing, absolutely nothing, until I say the word 'go.' Now I must see the minister at once! Wait for me here."

A quarter of an hour later the chief of the Sûreté Générale returned to his office. He had gone off in a state of congestion, his face ready to burst out in blotches. He came back paler than Lebouc.

"Well, what do you think the minister said, emissary?"

he demanded. "He said that you are more dangerous than the Puppet. And now slink off, and for God's sake be silent!"

On the following morning these few words on the first page under a big heading in the *Epoch* could be read:

> The affair of the Gory Puppet, which has already made so much ink and so much blood flow, is about to take on a new phase and to be of an appalling breadth and scope.

This was signed "XXX," the same as the articles which had appeared when the affair had first burst out.

CHAPTER XXVIII

On the Trail

ALTHOUGH Inspector Lebouc, for reasons which we shall soon learn, had abandoned the trail of the Puppet, Jacques Cotentin, whom we had left at Corbillieres looking at the torn clothing that had belonged to Christine, was hotter than ever after it.

After the horror of the first moment had passed, the surgeon thought that he had acquired, if not the certainty, at least the hope that his sweetheart was still alive. He could not tell exactly how the scene between the automaton and Christine—the scene which had thrown into a chaotic state everything in the room—had ended; but there were many indications which led him to believe that, despite the fact that he had found Christine's cast off garments, there was a reason for this.

Gabriel had made her discard her clothing and reclothe herself in fresh linen and more conventional dress. Some tickets which still adhered to various wrapping papers he had found bore the name of a dry goods firm at Merlun. This had led him to make a rapid inquiry, which had quickly ended in securing valuable information.

From another side he discovered proofs that the little machine that had been stolen from M. Lavieuville had been under the shed, and what was more, he learned the reason for it being stationed in this mysterious inclosure.

Some paint pots freshly opened, two large paint brushes, and other paints, not only attested to the freshening up of the little car, but furnished still further the most direct evidence of its manner of camouflage; so much so that after a few hours spent in Merlun, Jacques had acquired a lot of knowledge pertinent to the matter—the car, the occupants, and how they were dressed.

Taking care to leave nothing behind that he had found in the house—for above all he dreaded police interference, as he did not wish to be hampered in his researches—he set out again on the trail of the Puppet with every hope that he would soon catch up with him.

He had already lost too much time. He shivered as he wondered what must be Christine's condition, and how she bore her terrible situation. The traces of the last struggle at Corbillieres, in which she had fought so valiantly for her liberty, proved that she had started out sadly injured in body as well as feelings, and that she was still the prey of the monster, and had accompanied him against her will.

So, then, imagine the surgeon's surprise when, still pursuing the fugitives, he came to a little inn on the banks of the Marne, and there found that the little car had stopped, and that a young girl had got out and purchased some provisions, after which she returned to the machine where her companion, a young man, was tranquilly sitting at the wheel waiting for her.

This astonished Jacques. After the traces of the sanguine encounter at Corbillieres, it was amazing to discover that the affair was turning out less tragic than he had been led to believe. He was overjoyed, but he was none the less perplexed.

The automobile had made the rounds of Paris and taken

the road to Tourraine. Jacques was quite familiar with this route, although he lost some time on the trail, for the little car did not always keep to the main road.

The turns and twists of the car, designed to throw him off the trail, were very clever, showing that the Puppet had as much sagacity as if he were really a man, like others. Jacques was divided between admiration for his creation and horror of it. But since he had launched his automaton on the world, an event which should have filled him with pride and glory, we can state truthfully that our surgeon was proud of nothing.

As the truth dawned on him that Christine was not going with Gabriel as a prisoner, but as a companion, he was stunned. If he was thankful at this change of affairs, which we presume he must have been, we must also admit that he was rather annoyed.

The composition of some characters is such that the more satisfied they are, the more apparently indifferent and morose they grow. Jacques was even more surprised when he learned that the fugitives, after leaving Tours, had taken the road to Coulteray.

"I bet that's Christine's idea," he said to himself. He was forced to come to the conclusion that, although Gabriel had started this rampage—and in what a manner—it was now Christine who was the leader. Now it was the automaton who was doing all that she wished.

And what was it that she wished to do? To see once more the place, the memory of which haunted her—the place where she had left the ghost of the poor marchioness—pale phantom who came from her tomb at midnight to take her little stroll in the cemeteries.

"Well, well," murmured Jacques, suddenly gathering up all his energy, "now for Coulteray. And this will be a good reason to call on that excellent doctor again. I have not had news from him for a long time."

The surgeon had hired a little racing car, which he drove himself. He soon arrived at Coulteray and went at once to the Fairy Grotto Hotel and asked for the landlord.

"The good M. Achard has not quite recovered," replied the servant; "but if the gentleman would like to speak to him, I will take him up to my poor master's room."

"He has been ill then?" asked the surgeon, who was as anxious to learn the state of health of "good kind M. Achard," as of his first anatomical piece.

"Oh, yes sir, very ill, but he is reasonable, and does everything that the doctor orders. He follows the diet well."

Thereupon the maid pushed open the door.

"Here is a guest who would like to speak to you, *monsieur,* that is, if it would not disturb you."

"Should say not!" replied M. Achard. "When you are ill you can't have too much company. Come in, *monsieur,* and be seated."

Jacques made the round of a screen and saw the patient. He was sitting opposite a huge log fire which filled the big grate. On his head he wore a cotton cap pulled down to his eyes. A table near at hand, plentifully garnished with victuals and bottles, among which sparkled some fine Anjou wine, was awaiting the good pleasure of the convalescent.

For the moment he was well occupied. With a long handled spoon he was basting, with its own gravy, a very

appetizing spring chicken, which was revolving on the spit before the fire.

"Ah," said Jacques, who was not accustomed to the diet of the Cocagne district, "I see that if you have been ill, you are getting better, my good M. Achard."

"Euh! Euh!" replied the other, nodding his head. "I'm doing all I can to get better. All the same I'm a little anxious. Dr. Noricet hasn't been here for two days, and I'm obliged to set myself to rights all alone."

"Well, from what I can see, you are not doing so badly," said Jacques.

"I am on diet, *monsieur*. And as you seem to be in good health, I'll willingly share it with you. The honor is mine."

Jacques sat down, thanking him, but said that he was not hungry.

"You ought to consult Dr. Noricet. There is not another so able to cure an illness. I wasn't hungry, either. But he told me that I had to eat— So I eat."

"But what's the matter with you?" asked the surgeon. "You look wonderful."

"Euh! Euh!" moaned the landlord, swallowing the half of a steaming chitling which, accompanied with a plate of lentils, had been served to him in the place of soup. "Euh! Euh! You mustn't judge by their looks. I can tell you that I'm in a very bad state, no matter how I look."

"Well, what are you suffering from?"

"From the side, *monsieur*—the morale side."

"Oh, it's the morale?"

"Yes, it's the morale. I have a very bad morale, so the doctor says."

"Well, well, I wish you a speedy recovery," said Jacques,

smiling, for he thought that Achard was one who knew and appreciated a Rabelaisian joke. "I'll tell you what brought me here now. Do you happen to remember me?"

Achard looked at his visitor and then put down his fork and spoon, for he was serving with two hands at the same time.

"If I'm not mistaken," he said slowly, "it was you who came here to dine on the day that we buried the marchioness."

"That's exact—you are quite right, *monsieur*."

"You were staying up at the castle," he continued, his frown deepening; "you were with a young girl who was a friend of the marchioness."

"Yes, M. Achard, and I brought that young girl here to dine with me. Do you remember her, too?"

"Do I remember her! I should say I do! I haven't forgotten one thing about that terrible night. Why, the very thought of it makes me feel that my morale is being torn to shreds."

And he made the second half of his chitling disappear with a crunch of his big teeth. Then, in one gulp, he emptied a half bottle of Vouvray. Wiping his mouth, he looked at Jacques with a sort of melancholy consternation.

"What is it you want to know?" he asked.

"I want to know if you have seen that young lady since; if she has been here again."

M. Achard sighed.

"Now, you must not take it badly, young man," he said. "Believe me, even the best of women are always worked by the devil. You can believe a man who is no greater fool than others, and who has always been very

nice to the fair sex, although they have always deceived him. That's how it goes, young man.

"Now you'll just take a glass? That wine is bottled sunshine. It will give you a heart. Yes, that young lady came back, only eight days ago, and she was with another. And a young man at that!"

CHAPTER XXIX

Return of the Marchioness

THERE was a silence. After another bumper, he continued:

"She did not stay long. They were in a little automobile. She got out. They filled her provision basket for her. Then she got back in a hurry into the car next to her young dandy. She seemed as though she didn't want to be seen. I went closer to see who she was with.

"Well, the one who has replaced you—meaning no offense—is certainly a handsome chap! That may be some satisfaction to you. Oh, those women! Well, they drove in the direction of the château. I have learned since that she went to offer up prayers at the tomb of the *empouse*. I haven't seen her since."

"And the *empouse?* Have you seen her?" asked Jacques sarcastically, for although he had taken what the landlord had said with a good grace, he would like to have taken a dish and broken it over his head.

But although he put the question—and in the superior tone of one who is making fun of a fool—he did not expect it to have the effect that it did.

The landlord leaped to his feet. His fine color had fled. His eyes, which had sparkled just now with the effects of the life-giving wines, were filled with anxiety.

"Yes, *monsieur,* I have," he said in a low voice. "I have seen her again, and as recently as the night when your late

friend came back to the inn. And I was not the only one who saw her again. And those who did are as ill as I am. I had an apoplectic fit. Bridaille, the blacksmith, had a heart attack. He hasn't the strength to do anything, and he counted for something in his trade, he did! And Verdeil, who keeps the garage at the corner of the bridge, has had his mind so upset that ever since that night he mistakes his left for his right, and when one is driving an automobile, that's a pretty dangerous thing, so it appears.

"You know, *monsieur,* it wasn't as it was the first time when we saw her a long way off. Those who didn't see anything had the laugh on us. Well, now I'm sorry they were not in our place. This last time, the night I'm telling you about, was on a Tuesday. We were in the billiard room. Bridaille, Verdeil and I had just finished a game.

"We all felt inclined to go to bed. Verdeil had already lit his lantern. But the light was still on over the billiard table. That shows that we could see quite plain in the room. Suddenly there was a rap on the window.

" 'There,' Bridaille said, 'I bet that's my wife come to fetch me.'

"He opened the window.

"Then we all gave a scream and drew back. There, quite close to the window, near enough to touch us, was the *empouse.*

"There was no mistake about it! It was the Marchioness of Coulteray, as white as the snow which hadn't stopped falling all the morning. And then we recognized her voice."

"Is that so?" said Jacques, who, in spite of himself, was slightly taken aback. "So she spoke, did she?"

"Did she? Should say she did, and this is what she said. It is still ringing in our ears:

" 'Father Achard, it is I! The night is very cold, and I am afraid to be alone on the road. Will you take me back to my tomb?'

"I'm not inventing anything, I assure you! We couldn't make a move. We were as if turned to stone.

"Suddenly she gave a piercing shriek like a night bird, and off she sped. We saw her form disappear round the bend of the road, and she was followed *by another ghost.* The vampires chase each other at night, don't they?

"I fell down stiff on the floor. Bridaille, who has always been very religious, went on his knees. He was more upset than a man who has just had a glimpse of hell. Verdeil was the only one who had the courage left to go and close the window.

"They slept again that night at the inn, and in the morning they went home. But all three of us were so ill that they had to send for the doctor. And just as though it was done on purpose, he was away. Yes, it appears that he had gone to see a patient in Sologne. He didn't get back till the evening. And then he found us in a pretty bad state. We told him all about it. And he said he knew what it was.

"Dr. Noricet is a mighty clever doctor. He knows his business. He examined all three of us, and said our morales were affected, and he put us all on the same diet.

"All the food is prepared here. If you had passed by our kitchen you would have seen 'the diet' that the servant is carrying to Bridaille and Verdeil. But as I am the worst, my 'diet' is the strongest, that's only natural. Only to talk of it makes my morale bother me again. I think I'll attack the chicken."

Achard was not laughing, neither was Jacques. Refusing a last offer from his host, he took his leave and went at once out to his car. He stopped at Dr. Noricet's house. The maid told him that the physician was absent and would not return until night. Thereupon he went to Verdeil's garage, which was at the three crossroads at the corner of the bridge. He questioned the helper, from whom he got the correct information that the machine in which he was interested had stopped there for gas and had started for the road which leads to Saumur, which was to the west.

On receiving this information, to the man's great surprise Jacques took the road to the east, which led to Sologne, but late that night he came back and went on to sleep at Saumur.

The next morning at Saumur he learned that the two fugitives had arrived at the same hotel on the previous Wednesday and that they had asked for two rooms; that they had got up at daybreak and had left the little car in the garage of the hotel; and that they had had their luggage carried to the station. *Monsieur* might see the machine if he chose.

Upon questioning the station master he learned that the two had taken tickets direct for Nice!

To come to Saumur to get tickets for Nice. If that was not the height of trickery for an automaton!

An express, *via* Tours, which was to join the P. L. M. railroad to Lyons, passed an hour later. Jacques took it, after having left his machine also at the same garage.

He did not dare telegraph to the old clockmaker from any of the stations on the line, for fear the police would be on the alert and get on the trail before he had caught up with the Puppet. He wanted to judge the situation im-

partially and decide what to do. And yet he had an aching desire to know if Christine had sent word to him in Paris to let him know of this flight with Gabriel and how he might find them.

It was hard for him to think that old Norbert's daughter had so easily accepted the fate which the extraordinary succession of events seemed to force on her, without making heroic efforts to get word to her father and the man to whom she was engaged.

To try and drive away his anxious thoughts he bought some newspapers. A heading which he found everywhere flashed before his eyes:

THE GORY PUPPET!

And it was from this source that he learned of old Norbert's distracted confession and the statement that he had made to Professor Thuillier and the indescribable emotion that had gripped Paris.

When he reached Marseilles the local papers were beginning to give details on the trocar, which had been found at the house at Corbillieres, and telegrams relative to those who had first been pricked were being published.

Jacques saw in all this a strange suggestion, which could easily be explained, considering the state of mind that the public was in. Yet the scratches on the body of Father Violette and the last victims at Corbillieres, which they seemed to have verified, made him thoughtful.

He knew, if any one did, how the trocar happened to be found at Corbillieres, and he knew for a fact that neither the Puppet nor Benedict Masson had used it.

So? So there were other little pistols on the same order.

Now one enters into a state of affairs wherein the marquis, of whom no news had been heard since the funeral at Coulteray, is forcefully involved, and where the possibility of the proof of Benedict Masson's innocence, and consequently that of the Puppet, seems to stand out strongly. So much so that Jacques Cotentin wondered if it would not be better for him to take the train back at once to Paris. But his desire to catch up with the Puppet, or, rather, with Christine as soon as possible, overmastered him —for Christine's passive attitude perplexed him—so he continued his journey to Nice.

At Nice he lost the trail entirely.

That evening he was sitting before a table which was still littered with local week-end papers which gave the names of newly arrived visitors and the hotels at which they were staying. He searched the list in vain for information regarding "Mr. and Miss Lambert."

This was the name under which Gabriel and Christine had registered at Saumur. Suddenly his eye caught sight of some names of visitors who had recently gone up to a winter resort in the mountains at Peira-cava—famed for its winter sports—and had registered at the Hotel des Fiers-Sommets. In the list there was one which caused him to give a startled cry.

"M. and Mlle. de Beigneville."

This was the maiden name of Jacques's mother. His father had married a Mlle. de Beigneville, who often signed her name as Cotentin de Beigneville.

At any rate Christine had certainly chosen this name, so as to give him some clew without the dreadful automaton's knowledge. Dear Christine, so she was still thinking of him.

CHAPTER XXX

In the Snows

CHRISTINE's conduct now appeared to Jacques to be quite natural. She had come to the conclusion—and at what price?—that any effort to resist the frenzied will of the automaton could only end in disaster.

So she had finally followed him with assumed good grace, so as not to thwart the will of this terrible thing, which had the brain of an assassin. For Jacques could not forget that Christine could have no doubts on the guilt of Benedict Masson.

Poor dear beloved Christine! With such sure knowledge, what courage she had required to live in the company of such a formidable creature and *smile,* while bowing submissively to his will. For Gabriel must be spending his entire time watching her, forbidding her to make a move, a gesture, which might put his enemies on their trail and so break up this intimacy which he had not dared to hope for and which he owed only to this sublime and stupendous adventure.

And Christine had found out how to circumvent all that. Through space she had sent Jacques this appeal, which he alone could understand: Beigneville. This call had touched him like a Hertzian wave attuned to the receiving apparatus.

And he was hastening; he was going to save her, rid

her of her tyrant. Again he cursed his genius, which had only brought torture to her, and to the world great danger. And yet he could not but feel something for the Puppet. It was his child, his creation. However, he knew that he would not hesitate to destroy it.

The automaton was the work of a genius, but there was only one real thing in the world, and that was Christine. Nothing else mattered, if he could only clasp Christine in his arms.

So ran Jacques's thoughts, while the autocar climbed up from the valley of Paillon around the sides of the mountain, leaving Escarine behind. They stopped for some minutes by the little Luceram Square to permit the travelers to visit the curious church, the ruins of the fortress, the ramparts of the Roman colony, which was Luce Ara.

Old ruins—old scenes—a gulf of past ages. What were you to a man like Jacques Cotentin, who was bending over the gulf of the future and chasing a demon which had just sprung from the abyss at the imprudent call of his voice?

Woe to them who go ahead of the times, who anticipate the hour which regulates the march of the herd. Woe to the inventor. While waiting for the laurels of the future, chains are being forged for him. With one hand he throws the spark of Prometheus onto the world, but when he opens the other hand he finds the bird of ill omen, which on a day not far off will be the great vulture who will pluck out his heart.

After leaving Luce Ara the ascent became more difficult, and the first snows could be seen. At the same time a

panorama of immense beauty was unrolled before his eyes sweeping the length of the Riviera.

Jacques was quite sure that Christine had never been in these parts before, but in the course of his travels Benedict Masson might have passed that way—dreaming, perhaps, of a quiet retreat for two, a dream which he was now realizing.

A half hour before arriving at Peira-cava, which is one thousand five hundred meters above the level of the sea, the autocar had to stop. There had been a heavy fall of snow during the night. The roads were blocked—so deep was the snow that nothing but a sleigh could pass.

The driver informed his travelers that this was nothing extraordinary, and that the people of Peira-cava were frequently cut off from the rest of mankind for weeks at a time. The hotels laid in a stock of provisions so that their guests should not die of hunger.

Jacques, however, decided to go on. With only a stick to aid him he undertook the trip, despite all that was said to dissuade him.

When he arrived at his destination he was exhausted and cold and famished. It had taken him three hours to make one mile.

What a state he was in when he arrived at the Hotel des Fiers-Sommets, where he had read that M. and Mlle. de Beigneville were staying.

The hotel was kept by three sisters—Mlles. Elise, Florise and Denise. The three ladies bustled about their guest with the most praiseworthy hospitality. But Jacques, who had taken his place before the big stove, where his clothes began to steam like shavings, could only reply to their questions with these words:

"Tell me, is M. de Beigneville still here?"

They informed him that *monsieur* and *mademoiselle* had stayed only two days at the hotel, but, seeing the depressing effect that this information had on their guest, they hastened to tell him that the two for whom he inquired were still in the neighborhood. They had rented a little isolated châlet at the entrance of the forest on the road to Turini.

"It seems to me that they are a newly married couple," said Mlle. Denise with delightful conviction. "They are not like brother and sister. They are so very nice to each other, and they are never apart, no, not for a moment. They go along arm in arm, and they talk in such low voices. It is wonderful to watch them—and they are both so very handsome.

"Everybody admires them, although they do seem to live like hermits. I mean, they never will allow any one to call, and they are quite right! It is a pleasure to see them sitting side by side under a fir tree, holding one another's hands, watching others skiing and sleighing."

"*Mademoiselle,*" said Jacques hoarsely, for he was suffering martyrdom, "allow me to tell you that you are making a great mistake. I know those two people. I am a very near relative. They have come here to rest in the peace of the mountains after the strain of hard work and great sorrow. They are not, I assure you, a newly married couple. Your hotel register is correct. They are brother and sister."

"There! What did we say!" said Elise and Florise at the same time.

"We knew, of course, that they were brother and sister," continued Florise; "it was only that their devotion seemed so unusual. She is such a lovely lady and seems to look

after him like a mother. You could tell that they were somebodies. You never heard them speak one word louder than the others. Why—I never heard the gentleman speak a single word—now that I come to think of it."

"He is dumb," said Jacques.

"Oh, the poor gentleman!"

"Ah, now, that is why his sister never leaves him for an instant. Now are you convinced?" asked both the sisters, turning to Denise.

"Well, I ought to be," replied Denise with a little grimace. "If this gentleman here, who knows them, says that I'm wrong. All the same I am sorry, because he is so wonderfully handsome."

"Our sister is so very romantic," said the other two, "so you must excuse her."

"Look! Here they are just going by. Take a look at them; are they not just wonderful together?"

Jacques had just been served with some hot soup. He hastily put down the bowl, which he had carried to his lips, and ran to the window. He pressed his forehead against the pane. It was indeed they. And—they did not look like brother and sister.

They both wore white woolen sweaters. Christine's golden hair, under her little hat, which was too small to confine it all, made a radiant halo about her beautiful face. He was walking by her side grave and superbly handsome. His face of mystery was half hidden by the neck of his sweater, which he had pulled up, and the mountain cap.

Christine was holding him by the arm—very tenderly.

The romantic sister suggested that they should go out and meet the couple.

"No, I don't want to disturb them just now," Jacques objected.

He was very pale.

"Oh, *monsieur,* you are ill?"

He dropped into a chair.

"It is nothing, nothing," he muttered. "The fatigue has me for the moment." And slowly he began to drink his broth, a bitter smile gradually breaking over his face.

"If I should tell these good people," he thought, "that that young lady is only holding onto that young man because otherwise he might fall over, and then be unable to regain his feet—a pretty scene that would be—they wouldn't feel so romantic about them. How absurd the whole thing is—and how tragic! This Puppet of whom I am jealous—yes, I am—ridiculous that it is—has not yet learned to pick himself up when he falls."

Love is indeed a pathetic thing. This great genius had rejoiced because he had brought into the world this imperfect being, and now he was scoffing at his own powerlessness, because he had seen his sweetheart smile so tenderly on his sublime creation.

The romantic Mlle. Denise was quite right. And if Christine was holding that young god's arm firmly, she was, none the less, holding it very affectionately.

Vague thoughts passed through his mind. Here he had been so proud of his creation and now he hated the thing—and yet there persisted the feeling for it—the pride—against which his love and his fear for Christine fought. A strange situation, indeed.

He was in anything but a cheerful frame of mind, but,

despite his intense fatigue and moral depression, he took the road which the handsome couple had taken, and, trudging alone, passing a band of Alpine sportsmen who had just arrived, he at last came to the little châlet on the edge of the forest.

Freeing the Soul

He was about to turn the corner of the little wooden house when he heard Christine's voice and stopped abruptly. She was speaking to Gabriel. Jacques could not see either of them yet, but they seemed to be standing in the window looking over the vast sweep of the Alps, which were illuminated with the fires of the setting sun.

For several hours the tops of the mountains had been wrapped in a thick mist and were scarcely perceptible in the gray and humid chaos. Suddenly, as though by a sort of *fiat lux*, caused by one of the sudden gusts of wind which are so frequent in the Alps, the curtain of the clouds was lifted, torn apart, and then in order, the mountains, the valleys, and the plains seemed to quiver in the primitive furnace.

The voices were quiet.

Gradually the violet hues of eventide came to soften the flame—and the moon appeared on her silver chariot.

Christine's voice could be heard again softly:

"How very beautiful it is. All is beautiful now, dear Gabriel."

With what affectionate intimacy she was talking to him, how tenderly and sweetly! She found everything was beautiful now!

This phrase attested that the two were able to communicate in spite of the Puppet's dumbness, with a facility for which Jacques himself had arranged.

Had he not himself taught Christine the deaf and dumb language, so that she in turn could teach it to the Puppet? And this, with the aid of the little notes, would permit a conversation to be carried on between the automaton and his creators.

That voice had never, never spoken so sweetly to him, thought the man who listened with sadness in his heart.

"Nothing could be more beautiful than this, Gabriel. But why are you so sad? Life is better for you than it has ever been before, is it not? Since this miracle which has brought you again to face existence you see clearly, don't you? And you understand that there is goodness in the world and that you are part of it? You know that. Your poetry proves it. It is sublime. They are now only songs of triumph, and I have engraved them on my heart.

"You must not be sad, dear Gabriel. Listen—I will sing you the song that you wrote for me last night."

And then, in low melting tones, Jacques heard this bit of verse:

"What matters if the worlds are whirling in cycles which are too small to stop our thoughts; what matters it if in the worlds which possess a unique sun, the sands of time spread gloom around, while the earth crumbles? *My resplendency belongs to you.*

"Oh, Christine, thou criest aloud. Leave your crystal abode. Carry the secret of my thoughts to the higher heavens! Divulge your message to the proud orbs and fear not but that the stars will tremble before the crime of man. I, that you have made, come to you with clean hands and a pure heart. I have not the blood of sin marked on my forehead. *My resplendency belongs to you.*"

Jacques could not but be subdued by the beauty of this

strange recitative, which fell so exquisitely from the lips of Christine, but the words of dominating humility with which each stanza had ended rang terribly in his ears.

After this flight, which penetrated into the most distant confines of space, there was a silence. Then the conversation, the one-sided conversation, began again. And what a conversation.

"Your sufferings, my Gabriel, and your death, have made you a unique soul. You are the only being that a woman can approach with confidence, respect and infinite love.

"If my Gabriel is sad, he will see me sad, because he will be beneath his destiny.

"We have freed your soul from your body. You owe us your joy. Who can assign to the limits of the faculties the soul when it is not changed by any earthly thought, soiled by any human clay? If you were not what you are, I should not say to you, 'You are adorable.' "

Jacques leaned against the wall to keep from falling. He heard them closing the window, and pulled himself together and staggered a few steps. Christine was drawing the curtains. She saw him. She made a sign which nailed him to the spot. A few minutes later she joined him.

"Go away! Go away!" she said, panting. "He must not see you. You are putting up at the three sisters' hotel; I will come and see you this evening."

"Oh, I don't want to cause you any inconvenience," said Jacques.

And back he trudged again pathetically—poor old Jacques.

Was Benedict Innocent?

WHEN Jacques reached his hotel he was an object of pity, but he refused all care.

The three sisters did not wish to be indiscreet, so did not insist. All the same Catherine, the maid on the first floor, received orders to pile up the stove in his room with dry logs and slip a hot brick in his bed. At the same time a hot grog was carried to him, but he let the stove, the brick and the grog all get cold.

Holding around him the coverlet, huddled in the depths of an armchair, where he had sunk in his misery, he was shivering and coughing as he felt the first symptoms of a high temperature race through his fevered body.

Late as it was, they came to announce that Mlle. de Beigneville was calling.

He looked up at her gloomily as she came into the room.

"Oh, my poor Jacques!" she cried at once. "Whatever is the matter with you? You need looking after."

"You ask that! Oh, believe me, it is nothing serious. My heart is cold."

He began to sneeze.

"There, now! You must go to bed and let me look after you. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Why, it's difficult for you to breathe already! See here, Jacques, Catherine and I will have to put some poultices on you."

The poor chap gave a shriek of nervous laughter.

"Do you put poultices on Gabriel?"

"Why, dear, of course not. He is quite well," replied Christine, with a frankness that was somewhat astonishing. "Have you forgotten that he does not fear the cold nor the heat?"

"Oh, no, I certainly have not forgotten it. Lucky Gabriel! Never a cold in his head! No coryza, as Birouste the druggist would say regretfully. If everybody was like Gabriel the druggists' business would go into bankruptcy. No fumigations, and as for mentholated vaseline for the nostrils—"

"Jacques, if it is just to let me hear this freezing sarcasm—"

"Freezing is the word, my dear Christine. I am sarcastic because I am freezing. Forgive my bad temper."

"It's unworthy of a man like you, Jacques!"

"Unworthy of a man like me?"

"Pray, what have you done with your 'superior mind'?"

"Since you ask, I'll tell you that I don't know. I suppose I have left it on the way—somewhere—in the snow."

"At the bottom of you, you men are all the same. Oh, you are so very strong. You think you have the strength to climb to the sky, and then at the least little thing—*patatras*. And you won't let any one look after you. You are all as impossible, one as the other."

"And may I ask if you include Gabriel in that?" said Jacques, poking the fire.

"Yes; why not? You are so stupidly modest. You forget that women are sisters of mercy. As to Gabriel, why, when the time came to look after him he would not let me. I had to explain everything to him, and he looked after himself.

He won't even confide his little keys to me. As he tells, he can do his 'own housekeeping.' "

"Well, the great thing is," continued Jacques, in a voice that was getting more and more hoarse, and troubled by an irritating cough, "the great thing is that you now understand one another so perfectly."

"How you say that," exclaimed Christine, puckering her beautiful brows slightly. "Are you by any chance reproaching me for that?"

"Oh, dear, no! But even while I rejoice, it is natural that I should be somewhat astonished. I went to Corbillieres and I brought away with me those little notes that you left there, Christine. And at Corbillieres I saw the traces of scenes in which I have very good reason to believe that your life was in danger. So you can imagine my surprise when I see you go by, with him, hand in hand."

"But, Jacques, in one word I can make you understand. You were right. Benedict Masson was innocent."

"Is it Gabriel who has convinced you of that?"

"Yes."

"He convinced you under pain of death?"

"Perhaps so. I really believe that if he had not been able to convince me of it we should not be in this world to-day —neither he nor I. He was dragging me into a catastrophe from which, this time, you could not have brought him back to life!"

"Well, and what was it he said to convince you of his innocence?"

"You remember, Jacques, when you were experimenting on this great work—it was when you were working on the eyes, you said to me: 'He will see, but I do not believe that he will ever weep.'

"Well, he has wept!" cried Christine triumphantly.

"Yes, and when I saw the tears flowing on the wax of his face, it seemed to me that his soul, which we had shut up in a box, said to me, 'Christine, here is your work; living no longer with the motions of an automaton, but with the sensibility of a heart which you have made suffer with an eternal sorrow. Are you satisfied?'

"Then I wiped away his tears, but they did not stop falling until I said to him:

" 'Cease weeping, my Gabriel, for I believe in your innocence!' "

"And so you speak to him like that?" said Jacques.

"Is that all you can find to say to me on a matter so grave?" cried Christine, reproachfully.

"Yes, it is a very grave matter, not for him alone, but for us all. It is so grave that I did not hesitate to come this evening and—"

"And what?"

"Oh, nothing. Let me speak of Benedict Masson's innocence. And in the meantime I will try to forget Gabriel."

"Jacques, you have very bad thoughts," cried Christine.

"I am a man."

"Yes, and Gabriel is not a man."

"No, he is worse than a man."

"And wasn't it you who wanted him as he is?"

"Come on, now, let us talk about his innocence—I mean his innocence in so far as being a man. So then you saw him weep and you had faith?"

"Yes, I had faith. There is no other word to express it."

"And that was enough for Gabriel?"

"Oh, quite so; then he consented to explain. So long as I

did not believe in him, so long as I thought that I was the prey of a monster, he behaved like a monster; he carried me off in a whirlwind of rage. But when he saw that his tears had touched me he humbly submitted all the details of his misery to me with the confidence of a little child.

"He offered me his pitiful scrawl—in which his innocence cried out, explaining itself. Oh, Heavens, it was clear; so clear.

"You can judge for yourself, Jacques. It is true that he did hide the baggage of the woman who had disappeared in his cellar—but since they left their baggage behind, what would *you* have done with it? I ask you, Jacques, what answer could he have given to those who questioned him?"

"You ask me? Truly, women have a strange way of conceiving logic. Continue, Christine; you interest me. What does he say about Father Violette?"

"He said that Father Violette was perhaps the only one who knew the truth, or, at least, he had learned it at his own cost, and he had met his death because he had the knowledge of this truth.

"Gabriel imagined that Violette had witnessed the attack when little Annie was the victim. The gamekeeper had been watching Annie very closely for several days; he must have found her there and probably interfered at the moment of the tragedy—and they suppressed Father Violette."

A silence fell between the two young people, then Jacques said slowly:

"I had already said that to myself, and I also mentioned it to you, Christine, but perhaps you don't remember?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Fortunate memory."

"Yes, you did say it to me, but after that dreadful scene I could not hear anything."

"Yes, poor little Annie. And do you remember what Benedict Masson said at that trial, Christine? 'It is no real evidence because a man cuts a woman in pieces, that he has assassinated her. That is only circumstantial evidence.'

"There is a distinction—even that evidence is not sufficient proof that Benedict Masson did assassinate Annie. You see, Christine, when one is right, one has to know how to discriminate. Women, unfortunately, very seldom discriminate in their reasonings. In matters in which I have had a hand, I have no pity for myself—that is, so long as I don't get into the prisoner's dock at the Assizes."

"I should never have thought that a cold would change a man so much—however, I forgive you. You have the meanness of a sick person."

"My dear Christine, I am waiting to hear the story of little Annie. Did your Gabriel explain that to your satisfaction?" he said, feeling already rather ashamed of his attitude toward Christine.

Shivering with Fear

"I WILL tell you what he told me," she said quietly. "He wrote that one day when Benedict Masson was returning to his home, he found that the current in the river had carried a body almost to his door. The bookbinder did not know then that Father Violette had been murdered. More than anything, he dreaded the gamekeeper discovering little Annie's body. Violette was his enemy and he was still prowling round the neighborhood.

"And Benedict Masson knew of all the malicious rumors which had been circulated around Corbillieres. Not only would they declare that Annie had been his victim, but they would consider the tragedy of little Annie as sufficient proof that those who had preceded her had also been the victims of Benedict Masson, since the body was found, as you might say, at his doorstep.

"In his agitated state of mind he obeyed the first instinct of self-preservation. He stooped and took the body in his arms, then, as he had only a few steps to reach his home, he carried it into the house. And then he began to reflect.

"Perhaps later he realized that his act was the most damaging thing—for him—that he could have done, but I, myself, think that it was quite natural.

"The greatest danger now, was to take the corpse out again. Would it not be better to hide it in the house? But

how? Bury it in the garden? But if another one vanished, Benedict feared that there would be an investigation, that he might be suspected and that the police would search his house. And so, he finally cut up the body and burned it in the stove.

"He took the body down into the cellar, and while the stove was roaring above, he began his gruesome work. He was just finishing it when I appeared at the door. You know the rest, Jacques. Benedict Masson is a martyr."

"And Gabriel is an angel," said Jacques with a bitter smile.

"Jacques, do not be so unreasonable!" cried Christine. "Do let me look after you, I beg of you. You are shivering."

"I need a woolen nightcap," he replied with a hoarse, rattling laugh.

Christine wearily shrugged her shoulders.

"This is so unlike you, Jacques. Since I crossed this threshold, you have not said a friendly word to me. You have not even given me news of my father. Don't you think that I, also, have spent some frightful hours?"

"Do you remember them? Or have you forgotten in your love—"

"You are perfectly horrible. You seem to have something against me. Didn't I call you to come to me? The very name of Beigneville, didn't that let you know better than any telegram that I could have sent, even if I had known where to send one, but—even if I had attempted to send one, it could not have been done."

"Oh, no, you are well guarded. I am even wondering how you managed to get away to come here."

"He does not know. He is resting. I shall tell him tomorrow, very carefully. I shall have to use every precaution."

"Oh, yes, I implore you, Christine, don't forget to use every precaution. Gabriel is so very sensitive."

"You don't know *how* sensitive he is."

"Well, I'll give you a very good argument to hand him, and I hope it'll satisfy him. All this that you have told me regarding the disappearances at Corbillieres, can, if necessary, explain Gabriel's innocence, but it does not prove it. Listen, Christine, I believe that we have the proof. All that you have to say to him is this:

" 'I know that all the time that we have been here the attacks have still been going on in Corbillieres, and even in Paris. The newspapers are full of the dreadful actions of the Puppet! I have not spoken to you about this, Gabriel dear—you see, I have not forgotten how you speak to him—but I found a way to communicate with Jacques. Read the newspapers which he has brought to us right up here in these regions blocked off by snow, running the risk of a cold in his head—so hope on, dear Gabriel.' "

Without appearing to notice the biting sarcasm which underlined this little speech, which had been uttered in a hoarse, choking voice, Christine pounced upon the papers and ran her eye eagerly over them. When she came to the last article signed "XXX," she cried:

"Oh, his joy will be intense! You are right, Jacques; now I can tell him that you are here. This is an excuse all ready."

"Heaven be praised that you have an excuse for my presence," exclaimed Jacques, blowing his nose as decently as possible on a large handkerchief that sympathetic Catherine—out of pity for their guest—had taken from her

own "hope chest." "Heaven be praised, for I should have been very sorry to have gone away without a little greeting to him. Is he so very jealous then?"

"Oh, Jacques, more than you can possibly imagine."

"Well, then, and I'm jealous, too," cried Jacques with sudden vehemence, which brought on a fit of coughing that nearly choked him.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Christine. "*You,* you jealous of Gabriel! You, Jacques Cotentin, Wisdom itself—jealous of an automaton!"

"It is just as I say, Christine. Pygmalion loved his statue; I hate mine. I hate the Thing. That's how I feel about it now. Yes, I Jacques Cotentin, *wisdom itself,* hate that Thing! Don't pretend to be so astonished! That mask of amazement behind which you screen yourself, is the most hateful of lies! A so-called respectable woman who nourishes a criminal sentiment for the man who frequents the home, does not more brazenly ridicule her husband than you ridicule me!

"You have never loved me, Christine Norbert! You! You have only loved your dream—your ideal! I groveled at your feet. When you thought I was a genius, you raised me, simply because you wished me to use my science to give life to the unconscious image which had been your dream.

"Now that my work is finished I do not even exist for you, no more than the mechanic whom you send off as soon as you can dispense with his services. But he is better off than I am, for he is paid. But I! You've let me fall, as the students say—with a sharp metallic ring!"

"Jacques, have you gone quite mad?"

"Be silent! And if you have any modesty left, don't look

me so straight in the eye! Yesterday I heard you tell this: 'If you were not what you are'—this to Gabriel—'I should not say to you: "You are adorable!" ' "

"Oh, Jacques, don't be such a silly! I said it to him just as a mother would. Isn't he our child?"

"Liar! He is my child, mine! Yours indeed! Come, come, Christine, that's enough! Were you thinking of your child when your artist hands made the cast of his superb face? I tell you, your hands were serving your heart, and that heart of yours was cooing like a dove. Ah, now, this is the man I could have loved, you said to yourself. And then you turned to me and said:

" 'Here, breathe on this clay!' And in my arrogant pride, I borrowed the breath of the gods and I breathed on the clay—and it lived—and I am forgotten."

"I wish that the child of your genius had torn me to shreds, as I thought he was about to do," cried Christine. "What shall I do between the two of you?"

Jacques suddenly subsided. "Don't worry," he said, "this cold seems pretty serious—a cold can turn to bronchitis—then pneumonia. And then there will be no question of your happiness, my dear."

Christine was not listening to him, but to sounds from without.

"Oh!" she warned. "Listen!"

They heard footsteps in the corridor—regular, rhythmical steps, which Christine well knew.

The girl shook with terror.

"It is he," she breathed. "What will happen?"

In her foolish love for the Ideal, Christine realized now that she had been guilty. Terror clutched her heart as the thought that here in the little house in the Alps, through

her fault, a frightful tragedy might take place. Here was this Being that they two had created—coming to them.

The door opened. Gabriel entered.

The folds of his Alpine cape were laid upon his perfect form with the austere beauty of an antique statue. There was not a mark of an emotion upon his placid and beautiful and still face. This apparition, which was stronger than death, dominated the scene.

A Terrifying Turn

"MONSIEUR," said Catherine, as she entered the room of Jacques Cotentin the next morning, "here is something for you."

She handed him an envelope, in which there was a letter from Christine and some clippings from the Paris papers and others. The letter read:

MY DEAR JACQUES:

Everything went off yesterday better than I dared hope. Gabriel is jealous of you, yes, for he loves me, but he knows that you and I are engaged and he acted with the utmost nobility. He might have overwhelmed me with reproaches, blamed me for my lack of confidence, even accused me of being untruthful, but I assure you *there was not even a question of you!*

I gave him the clippings in which there is some hope of clearing Benedict Masson and he is cheered. There is nothing more to do than leave it to the gods—who, under the circumstances, are the detectives of the Sûreté Générale—and everything will be made clear.

I can already see the moment when we shall not have to hide this miracle, which you have wrought, and when at last you can gather in the laurels which are your due.

This morning when the roads had been cleared by our fine little Alpine chasseurs, an automobile came along from Nice; it stopped at the tobacconist's.

We were just passing there on our return from chapel—Gabriel is now quite pious. The chauffeur was reading aloud from a newspaper of the previous evening. Old Triphaine, the sledge maker, and the *garçon,* who was just coming out of the wine shop, were listening to him. We stopped to listen. I looked at Gabriel. His eyes flashed so that I wonder they did not scorch those infamous pages!

You have placed our Gabriel on a high plane. Truth and justice seemed to be the only thing for him. His righteous anger was such that the springs of his "cage," in which you tried to close up this superhuman soul, vibrated. He turned to me and his very gesture was a command:

"Let us go!"

Oh, how well I understand our Gabriel. "Let us go" this time does not mean to escape, but to fight! He is not dealing with shadows; he knows his enemies now!

This new article about the trocar throws a dazzling light over the whole criminal affair.

The marquis and his Durga! It is probably only a question of her and their friends. This is the band of accursed ones that must be put out of existence. To dare to accuse our Gabriel of being a party to those horrors! To dare to believe that Benedict Masson was a purveyor to this infamous band!

Our Gabriel is glorious at this tragic moment when he defies the world. I seek the flaming sword in his hand! I see it! Pray for us, my dear kind Jacques, and do take care of yourself.

Ever yours,

CHRISTINE.

P. S.—I asked his permission to write this letter to you. He consented at once. I wrote it in the tobacconist's, so you must excuse this poor note paper. I asked Gabriel also, if it would not be better to take you along with us, but he saw you yesterday in such a state that he made me understand that it would be more charitable to let you stay behind and rest. I did not insist. I

know you so well, and I know that you wouldn't hesitate to come and share our dangers. You will soon hear some talk about us, my dear kind Jacques.

The effect this letter produced on Jacques Cotentin's mind was disastrous. There comes a time when one, who up till that moment has been well balanced, loses faith in everything. The invisible balance, which is the just appreciation of events, of people, and of things, suddenly gives him a shock—he staggers, stretches out his arms, but finds nothing at which to clutch—and there's a man down.

This letter from his sweetheart made him dizzy. There was a pain at his heart. He saw that she was sincere, and that she thought that she loved him—but, in reality, she pitied him—him, Jacques Cotentin.

If the surgeon had retained the fine lucidity which his professors and pupils had so admired he would have been less astonished at what had happened, and especially at what had happened to Christine. She was now living in the radiancy of a god far from contingencies. She also had become a pure spirit.

Well, so much the worse for Jacques. He should not have imposed this phenomenon on the world. His sublime work, which had wrecked his happiness, now stupefied him.

In perfect frankness she said: "Take good care of yourself!" She said that to him! Why, it was this very attitude of hers which seemed so monstrous.

"I'll take good care of myself—you shall see what I will do," he cried. He sprang up, but, as might be expected, fell back unable to move, and a moment later was a sick man in the capable hands of the maid, Catherine.

The papers from which the clippings were cut, which Christine had sent to Jacques, gave the automaton affair a

terrifying turn. The anonymous writer, who signed himself "XXX," writes:

"The emotion and anxiety which have stirred the whole country by the resurrection—it is now or never that we can use this term—of the Corbillieres trial sprang as much from the scientific miracle as from the subsequent events—the continuation of the same crimes. And so great is the emotion that even those who refuse to believe in the Puppet are unable to conceal their anxiety at the problem which now confronts all—the possible innocence of Benedict Masson.

"We can assure the public that although Benedict Masson was very guilty, he was not the only guilty one. The crimes of Corbillieres, which were inconceivable in their connection and their proportions, could not all be laid at the door of the Corbillieres recluse. This monster was perhaps, after all, merely the instrument of a band—let us say rather of a sect—which has made murder a sort of cult.

"In spite of the many risks which we have encountered in the course of the investigations, and the extreme difficulty of making them, they are now sufficiently advanced for us to state with authority that in the very suburbs of Corbillieres, not far from the gloomy abode of this sinister Robinson, who, without doubt, had been posted there as an advanced sentinel, a society, among the members of which are some of the most famous personages of Europe, has installed its sanguinary gods.

"To understand that such a thing could be possible in our days, we must remember that the cults of the Orient, dark and dreadful as many of them are, have always had some hold on the Western world.

"The dread organization with which we now have to

deal emanates from India, where it has long been recognized and even legalized. The positive existence of this organization, dedicated to the destruction of human life, was disclosed in the middle of the last century by Sir William Bentinck, the Governor. They have no more doubts as regards its existence, its ramifications, or its deeply rooted habits throughout the country. The proofs are abundant, and the body which it directs is known.

"From Cape Camorin to the Himalaya Mountains it covers the soil, spreads out to the forests, inhabits the villages, mingles with the most respected citizens, submits to a code of morality, elsewhere severe, ranging over the entire territory. It has no other means of existence, no other glory, no avowed object or religion than to kill.

"The Occidental philosophers have remained open mouthed, with eyes fixed on the phenomenon; when the proven facts were forthcoming to attest to it they could not refute nor understand it. What rational explanation could be given to such an anomaly? The society rests on the needs of conservation; there are thousands of men associated for destruction.

"They kill without scruple, without remorse, according to a system more binding, more logical, more complete than all our metaphysical systems. Assuredly this is a prodigy. The assassins or thugs are not only moralists, but priest-artists.

"Their formulas for strangling a traveler are *savant,* their researches of elegance, of grace, even the proceedings of assassination would do honor to the invention of a poet. Not one among them would dare employ a slip-knot that had been roughly made, or contrary to the manner of form consecrated by tradition; there is a solemnity, a poetry, a

grace, a self-esteem, a conscientious duty in this infernal sect.

"These demons believe themselves to be angels. They die calmly and proudly. They sleep in peace. If British justice puts its hand on them, they present themselves fearlessly and die without shame.

"They are the deacons of the frightful goddess Kevi, the Mistress of Death, who is still called Kali or Dorga. All murderers look upon her as their protectress, human sacrifices alone please her.

"Formerly they were divided into 'Thugs of the North' and 'Thugs of the South,' with their special rites. At the end of the last century a new sect has come into greater power, and tends more and more to blend in it all the elements of 'thugism.' This is the Thugs-Assouras, which complicate their criminal rites with all the practices of Vampirism.

"The Assouras, in order to conform to ancient customs, still strangle their victims, but not until they have emptied their veins and imbibed their blood. They are able to prolong the torture for weeks, months, and even years.

"It is the women they attack almost exclusively. When their victim is beautiful and gifted with robust health they restrain themselves from finishing with her at the first séance. Some of them set themselves to love her, to cherish her, and all the more so, as many among them again find in her the life which is fleeing from them.

"And now we must conclude this article with a statement which is most painful to us. But there are scandals which cannot be ignored without danger to the public morals, above all when they are accompanied with facts as monstrous as those which it is our duty to denounce.

"The Assouras are not all of Indian origin. Some Europeans, who for many years have been established in India, attracted by the mystic rites and, let us say the word, the diabolical doctrines of these fierce ceremonies, have been able to penetrate into the temple of the Assouras, and they also, in turn, have become worshipers of the priestess Kali, called also Dorga.

"And when they returned to Europe they brought with them the habits of Vampirism, a criminal thirst which it was not possible for them to satisfy.

"Some years ago they formed a society in London, but this has been suddenly dissolved as a result of a formidable indiscretion. Well—this society has been re-formed in France!

"Its ceremonies have been transferred to this country, its atrocious ritual, and also its modern methods, of which the 'trocar,' which strikes the victim from a distance, is not the only sample.

"The names? The day is near when they will have to be given out. We hope that we have not made ourselves the instruments of a vindictive public. We will leave this to those to whom it belongs by right.

"But we can already begin to search.

"These names are not all of foreign origin. They are inscribed—and not to our glory—in the margin of the History of France.

"Benedict Masson knew these names well.

"Search around Benedict Masson's house, around Corbillieres. The swamp is not only a refuge for wild ducks. There are other birds in the neighborhood. Search around the goddess Dorga!"

CHAPTER XXXV

Christine Is Captured!

CHRISTINE awoke once again in the little room at Corbillieres, where she had spent such tragic hours. But now that she had reached the height of her destiny she accepted all with the serene brow of fatality.

She made herself as beautiful and as impressive as her marvelous companion. The same august force urged them both onward.

The dangers which they still had to run, and of which they had but a faint suspicion, awaited them and they felt them, but they were not afraid.

Some hours had passed since they had arrived at Corbillieres. Where could Gabriel find a better refuge than in this little doomed house, which had been abandoned and shunned since its association with horror. As we have seen, the police seals held no obstacles for them.

Gabriel, in fact, was chiefly concerned with having a safe place in which to leave Christine, for he had in mind a journey to the "Two Doves." This was the place clearly indicated in the article by "XXX." Knowing that Christine had already been the victim of Georges-Marie-Vincent and his acolytes, the mechanism which was beginning to develop a human soul planned that he would put only himself in danger, leaving the girl whom he so strangely loved in peace.

Therefore, when he thought that she was resting from the fatigue of the journey, he, who knew no fatigue, slipped out of the house.

Christine's intuitions were keen, however, and she got up and went into the room where she had left him.

He was not there.

She searched for him all over the house.

The time had gone when she had been terrified because he had been in the house with her. Now she was terrified because he was not there—and terrified for him, not for herself. Ever since he had been able to make a move she had been with him. If he should fall? What could have induced him to risk going about by himself? She opened the front door and sent out a cry in the clear night.

"Gabriel! Gabriel!"

Then suddenly she saw his form disappearing at the bend of the road which led through the woods to the "Two Doves."

She rushed out. She reached the woods where the denuded black trunks of the trees seemed to have been placed there like sentinels to prevent her from passing.

"Gabriel!" she called a second time.

For all reply there was a peculiar whistle.

At that moment something touched her lightly on the neck. It was a light sharp sting, which caused her to stop abruptly in her race. Then she shuddered with thoughts too awful for coherence. Was she a victim of this terrible sport which was making all Paris shudder?

"Gabriel! Gabriel!" she called again, frantically. Already the heavy torpor was coming upon her. She made one more great effort to continue her course. She had covered a hun-

dred yards, but saw no signs of Gabriel. Then suddenly she sank to her knees.

Although semiconscious, she could see—she could think.

She recognized the great black form which swooped over her—Sangor!

He threw his cloak over her, enveloping her from head to foot. Then, lifting her in his arms, he carried her off like a child. She could offer no resistance; she could not even cry out. A heavy languor, somewhat intoxicating, came over her, depriving her of her will to struggle.

When she regained the power to observe she was in a place which made her believe that she was dreaming, and yet it could not be a dream. The strange visions before her were too precise; it was all too vivid, too regular in form and movement.

First, all her senses were impressed by the rhythm of dances, the richness and originality of costumes, the permeating odor that perfume burners were diffusing in light clouds, the odd far-away sounds of weird music—short phrases which finally imposed themselves upon all the movements of the body like a servitude.

The large room, which resembled a hall in a temple, had for its only decorative note the rich rugs on the stone slabs and the walls, but they were of marvelous beauty.

Were they from Persia or China, or had they traversed the centuries to attest to the ancient work of India in its greatest days?

There were tissues of silk in thick close weaves, or fallow tones, the groundwork taking the aspect of gold and reds of a warm dazzling intensity. The rich decorations of flowers, arabesques, palms and roses, acquired a rival value to the most beautiful and softest of wool. Others pre-

sented symmetrical images and ornaments such as the Chinese use in their symbolic compositions for their prayer rugs.

Some low couches, on the style of the *cubiculi,* heaped with skins of wild beasts, spoils of the jungle, were placed around the hall. Upon the couches the guests were reposing, immobile, awaiting the ceremony which was to revive the Oriental mysteries.

Numbers of torches lit up the spectacle, throwing out their pale lights, the color of silver.

Christine, like the other guests, was reposing on a couch covered with skins. She was clothed in a robe of black silk with arabesques of gold. Her ankles and arms, which were bare, were laden with bracelets of rare workmanship. They seemed so heavy that she felt she would never have the strength to lift them.

Suddenly a gong was struck. This was a signal for the dancers to stop. The almost nude figures of the bronze-colored Orientals advanced in groups to the end of the hall, prostrated themselves, then regained their positions and retired in silence.

From the points where their glistening bodies had bent there were some high steps, at the top of which elaborate draperies were hung.

Christine's gaze had followed the Orientals prostrated in their adoration; her gaze rested on the flight of steps.

Now the torches threw out a greenish, sinister light and the forms on the couches, which until then had remained motionless, arose like corpses springing from a tomb. All the dark shadowy eyes were turned toward the draperies at the head of the stairs. They were waiting for something. What? Christine shuddered.

The Kiss That Killed

THEN high up, the folds of draperies, in which the steps were lost, were flung wide open, disclosing a throne of gold and black, and on the throne the Goddess of Death.

Christine recognized Dorga.

She was beautiful and prodigiously baleful, distant and dreadful, like Proserpine in the infernal regions.

In the worship of Dorga there were joined the mysteries of Elusis, of Delphis, of Thebes, of Babylon. All of these cults offered to the initiated the most atrocious and also the most resplendent spectacles, combined with an appeal to all the passions. The basest emotions of the human breast are decked by them with poetry, and all the dark moods of man are called from his depths to play about the bestial gods and goddesses.

Then Saib Khan, the famous physician, the fashionable thaumaturgist whom Christine recognized by his eyes of an houri and his crimson mouth and jet black beard, approached the throne and uttered the first words of the celebrated hymn, which is sung every year in the temple at the time of the ceremonies of *Dorga-Pourana:*

"Oh, great black goddess, Divinity of Calcutta, your promises are never in vain!

"You, whose favorite name is *Koun-Kali*—Devourer of men.

"You, who drink unceasingly the blood of demons and mortals.

"You, who live under the earth and then return to the light!

"August Virgin, who nourishes the generations.

"Oh, Death, the prolific Mother, who nourishes thyself with the ashes of the Universe!

"We beseech you to descend to us and give to us the life which will give us youth. Come! Dorga! Come! We await you!"

Dorga stood up, then descended in the midst of green flames, the black goddess with the golden nails.

Her beautiful body, which was partially veiled with a waist-piece of pearls, uncoiled with harmonious languor, as if in truth she was awakening from a long sleep, coming from the depths of the lower regions and joyous to have again found the motions which a baleful repose had snatched from her.

She danced. It seemed as though a gleam of dawn was born beneath her footsteps.

It was no longer the Goddess of Death. It was no longer Dorga. It was Venus, the dark, burning Venus of the evil heart, borne on the waves of the slimy Ganges.

She carried a crimson light, which made the green flames of the torches recoil. It was the dismal light of the funeral pyres on the banks of the sacred river which are put out at the coming of dawn.

The dance, which had begun languorously, quickened to frenzy. The music rose, shrilly—became faster and faster. Madly she whirled with it, indistinct in the gleaming path of light that she made—nothing but a flaming pyramid of color, in the midst of which shone the double circle of her golden nails.

Then she fell to the ground. The music stopped. A lugu-

brious moan arose. Dorga's arms were outstretched and her mouth wide open, as if she were at her last gasp.

The grave-drawling voice of Saib Khan arose:

"Dorga is dead. She has returned to the lower regions, the black goddess with the golden nails. We did not know how to keep her with us."

He spoke in the same tone as that in which one chants a litany. The moaning was renewed with greater force.

Then Saib Khan raised his hand and turned again to the people and pronounced words which were the sacramental formula of the sect, the words being uttered in the Lamasie dialect, the ancient language of the Society of Thugs:

"May the Boras separate from the Bitous."

This means the thugs must now be separated from the travelers, which, interpreted, means: "If there is one present who is not one of us, and who does not share our belief, he must be sacrificed."

Then a voice spoke which had yet not made itself heard, but which now made Christine turn round sharply in terror, suddenly shaken out of the lethargy in which she had remained. She recognized the voice of Georges-Marie-Vincent, the Marquis of Coulteray!

Since the beginning of the ceremony he had been there beside her, waiting for the moment which would allow him to claim her as his victim and his bride.

She tried to scream, but there was only a gurgle in her throat. She wanted to flee, but Coulteray's arm held her back. She half arose, then fell back and lost consciousness completely.

When she again opened her eyes she was dazed and weak. She gazed about her. Dorga had risen and was again dancing as though transported in an ecstasy of victory up to

the black and gold throne. Finally she seated herself, triumphant, taking again the attitude of the great goddess.

She was about to disappear in the same way that she had come when Saib Khan made a sign. The music ceased and on the air, heavy with the perfumes of the Orient, rang:

"Dorga. You are not only the Goddess of Life and Death, you are also the great distributor. Your right hand is full of benefits, your left hand is full of punishments. Hear us.

"Know you, Dorga, that this is the last time that we shall call upon thee here. We do not know where the next ceremony will be held. It is through the folly of the most humble of our servitors that we are forced to flee from this temple, hallowed by our many observances to thee. Through the stupidity and dangerous pranks of this little animal the wrath of the ignorant in the Capital has risen up against thy servants. This servitor, no more than a small animal, we sacrifice to thy sight, and implore you to grant us pardon."

Thereupon the gigantic Sangor made his appearance. He was holding the dwarf Shing-shing by the hair. Although the little creature kicked about in the most comical fashion, no one laughed.

Sangor held him high, while the dwarf uttered his outlandish cries, and Saib Khan pronounced the sacrificial formula:

"The gage—is it good?"

And the correct reply from a thug, who gives the signal for execution, came:

"*Boujna kee; Pawne Dee.*"

That is to say: "Deliver the gage of the son of my sister."

And at once Sangor put the dagger through the body of Shing-shing.

The marquis tried to prevent Christine from looking by placing himself between her and the spectacle, but she preferred to look at even this atrocious ceremony—this slaying of Shing-shing, rather than the face so near hers, that face which she had seen bending over hers as she had seen it bend one day to give Anne Elizabeth the kiss that kills.

A Memorable Séance

The last article which had been signed "XXX," while increasing the scandal to the utmost possible, and even the impossible limits, had brought about a movement in Paris in which all the wheels of the state were set going.

It was not only the emotion in the streets which had to be reckoned with, but that of all the great civic bodies. The Minister of the Interior reproached the Sûreté Générale bitterly for allowing the press to be so "indiscreet."

It was the Press which was keeping up the unhealthy excitement at public reunions, in the syndicates, and even in the clubs at which politics were the most tabooed, for the affair of the Puppet had become neither more nor less than a political affair which the mass tried to ridicule, but under which perhaps there might be an appalling denial of justice.

In the bosom of the best families, which until then had been most united and most peace loving, they threw themselves at each other's heads for anything and for nothing. This phenomenal creature caused them to treat one another as foes. Among those who admitted its existence, some were for its innocence, others for its guilt, or at least its complicity.

People took sides, as if the creature were a living man. Families quarreled over whether he was or was not a mon-

ster. Men of science wrangled over whether he was or was not alive. Eventually the whole burden of clearing up the matter of the Gory Puppet was put up to the Secret Service.

So much the worse for the Secret Service.

Certain newspapers declared that the law would be forced to try Benedict Masson again. This was a procedure which could never have been anticipated as possible—the conditions which made it possible had never been anticipated by any law nor any jurisprudence. The judicial *Gazette* made itself heard at once in violent protest against such pretension. In the first place, for the revision of the trial there would have to be a *new* fact and the *Gazette* declared that they had discovered nothing fresh, nothing new.

To this the rival papers came forward and said that it would be certainly something new to see a man who had once been executed for a crime come back to plead his innocence before the same court.

And if he is guilty, came the retort, here would be something without precedence. Where could you find anything *newer* than this guillotined man representing his own case to the magistrates and the magistrates finding themselves in the position of being obliged to send him to the guillotine a second time? Ah, that, my dear colleagues, is a little too new!

Even those who believed in the miracle which Jacques Cotentin had wrought, were aghast at the ramifications of the possibilities which the acceptance of that miracle involved—it was terrifying.

If such an event should come to pass, there would be a

revolution in judicial customs so great that society would shake in its foundations.

First it would make capital punishment impossible, because it was *ineffectual,* as they say in court, and the assured triumph for those who were advocates for its suppression, without mentioning the intolerable delight of *messieurs les assassins.*

For example, this is the conclusion from a brief conversation between the minister and the Chief of the Secret Service: "Either the Puppet does exist or it does not exist. If it does not exist, *it must not be invented!* If it does exist —let Jacques Cotentin take heed of this—it must be arrested and suppressed! It must be annihilated without any form of a trial. You have understood me, Bessieres. Those who do not understand this will never be statesmen; I tell you this to your face."

The Chief of the Sûreté gloomily returned home that night saying to himself: "Yes, but before suppressing him, we must arrest him! But suppose I do arrest him and cannot suppress him, what then? They have caused me so much annoyance with their Gory Puppet that I'd hand it over to them for a present at once."

That day there was an important séance at the institute. The subject was: The Gory Puppet. Its existence was going to be discussed, or rather the possibility of its existence. The perturbation which the Puppet brought into the administration and judicial domains was as nothing compared to the commotion it caused in the scientific world.

It was a double tempest coming from the two opposed points of the horizon, blown on one side by Prof. Thuillier and on the other by Prof. Ditte, dean of the school. It met in a frightful tornado, which penetrated under the arches

of the institute and wrought enough havoc to blow off the roof.

It was a memorable séance opened by an address—extremely moderate in its form and tendencies—by Prof. Tiradel. Some of those who were present returned to their homes without their false collars.

But yet President Tiradel had done nothing to cause such agitation among those present.

"Gentlemen and fellow members of the institute," he said, "it is for us to calm public opinion which has been so terribly agitated, and that by a member of this body—M. Jacques Cotentin, one of the most notable of the School of Medicine, who is now and has been for some time in parts unknown.

"He has the reputation with the populace of having invented an automaton into which he has injected a species of life. It is charged that he has placed in it, and given life to —the brain of a murderer, which he has caused to function so that the murderer, once put to death for his atrocious crimes, is again let loose on the world.

"This at least, incredible as it seems, is what Jacques Cotentin is charged with, and we as savants, are now brought face to face with the fact that we have to consider this idea. This news is not reassuring for the public, and it is for us to say whether this phenomenon is possible or not. Let us, my dear colleagues, open the discussion and consider the matter seriously. After we will put it to the vote."

There was nothing very bad in that for any one. Yet an ardent admirer of Prof. Thuillier, although he had promised to keep cool, could not endure the tone of light sarcasm in which this had been said.

"You are an old codger!" he shouted.

There was general consternation, then a frightful uproar. Every man was on his feet.

"Where are we?" demanded Prof. Tiradel, who was very pale.

"In France," they cried. He sat down in the midst of another uproar. The dean got to his feet.

"Gentlemen, do not forget that the whole world is looking at us."

"Come back to the question," implored President Tiradel, tugging his white beard, which gave him a strong resemblance to Chancellor d'Aguesseau. "Ah," he thought, "nothing is respected nowadays. Science itself, by its unexpected revelations, mocks at her savants. Anarchy is rampant. What was truth in my young days is considered nothing but a foolish blunder now. I have lived too long," he murmured heroically.

Nevertheless he had a window closed because he felt a draft. Under his heavy eyelids he was looking admiringly at Dean Ditte, who was angrily attacking Prof. Thuillier's communication to the press.

The interruption of the juniors of the institute moved him not a whit. Tiradel might have doubts, but he, the dean, remained firm in his belief. He knew the limits of progress. He had learned them from the books which had made the brains of his generation—books full of saving apophthegms, thanks to which one need not fear the free play of imagination. There are certain rules which cannot be ignored without the matter falling into a farce.

The dean did not say in words: "Prof. Thuillier is a joke," but every one understood. He sat down satisfied in the midst of another uproar. Thuillier, who was not connected with the institute, could not reply, but he was ob-

served to be busily urging on friends of his to take the floor, which one of them soon did.

"I admire the scathing sincerity with which the dean tells us of the nervous system which Jacques Cotentin has given to his automaton," he said. "He is alleged to have given a peculiar kind of life to this Puppet by the use of a serum, electricity and radium.

"It is my belief that we should consider the possibilities thus presented very seriously. We are savants, that is to say, individuals who can take up the question in general order. We must first humbly confess, that, as regards nervous phenomena, we have made very little progress.

"A quarter of a century ago, when Ramon y Cajal published his observations on nerve tissues, our honorary president, Dr. Braney, himself a great specialist in nervous disorders, states, in a note which appeared in the accounts of the meetings of the institute in 1887, that 'the similarities of propagation of the nervous wave and the electric wave, and the analogy of structure and of function between the filling tube and the "neurones" was most extraordinary.' "

"Never mind all that," piped up a very old man, whose name was now forgotten, but who had been one of the great little glories of the past century and was the oldest member of the institute, "you are taking the question too high, or rather you are going outside the question. Bring it lower, my dear colleague, much lower. Leave the neurones alone and tell us about Gabriel's siphon."

What applause the little old man had!

"And I'd like to know about his 'innards,' " shouted another.

That was the end of anything serious. A wild burst of

laughter swept through the hall. The indignant protests of the juniors and the phalanx were drowned by the noise.

Then the dean proposed that the discussion be closed and the issue voted on.

A few moments and the president stood up and uttered these historical words:

"The majority! No! The Gory Puppet could not exist!"

He had not even had the patience to wait until they had had time to count the voices. The majority was so overwhelming.

"The Gory Puppet *could not exist!*"

So common sense, reason such as certain savants saw it at the end of the last century, had won!

At this moment, while they were congratulating President Tiradel on his victory, a messenger entered with a note from the President of the Council.

M. Tiradel recognized the minister's handwriting. He hurriedly tore it open.

Then he let out a cry which was like the moan of a wild beast which feels that it has received its death blow.

But he always liked to finish in fine style. He had just sufficient strength to get to his feet. The noble old man stood up towering over the excited crowd like a specter.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have just received the news that the Secret Service has arrested the Gory Puppet."

What, however, he did not say, was that the minister had added:

"Now be careful! No blunders!"

But, alas, the blunder was made.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Lebouc's Master Stroke

IT HAD really happened! The Puppet had been arrested and it was Lebouc who had arrested him.

M. Bessieres was in his office at the Sûreté Général, utterly dejected. He had been through some very disagreeable moments in which his self-respect had suffered and which had threatened to be disastrous to his ambitions. The scene had taken place at a meeting of the cabinet council, which his minister was holding down below in his quarters, and the meeting was not yet over.

The door suddenly opened. The attendant had no time to say a word before the door was slammed in his face. Lebouc had entered. He stood face to face with the chief of the service.

Lebouc's eyes shone, his face was flushed, his hair disheveled, but in spite of his appearance he had an air of victory, which to those who knew him, might well be a cause for great anxiety, for Lebouc's victories were generally the victories of Pyrrhus, that means that they would surely be followed with the most disastrous results.

So despite his triumphant air, it was not only with a certain anxiety that his chief greeted him, but he was also annoyed with the inspector.

"Well then, so you are back, Lebouc, and I am just wondering what you are going to tell me."

"Something amazing, chief!"

"Yes, but first of all I'd like to know if you have had anything to do with those articles that have been appearing in the newspapers—aiming at the scandals of Corbillieres. Didn't I order you the other day to keep silent on that subject?"

"Well, chief, I am showing up those scandals at Corbillieres," said Lebouc boldly; "it was I who sent that information to the press. I wrote those articles."

"You! You are 'XXX'?"

"I, myself, chief!"

"The devil!"

"See here, chief, I have had enough of being M. Lebouc, the Emissary, always working for others and never getting any glory or profit out of it—nothing but miserable ingratitude. I have always been the one to be sacrificed, and I have always been ready to be sacrificed. I have been up against it all these years. I want nothing better than to work for you—to serve one's country is a noble work, but I don't want to be crushed entirely by it.

"I made a bad beginning in life. Then the day came and I went over to your side, because I knew that you were stronger. You have proved that. I have been up against this strength ever since. But I got tired of it, and at last I said to myself: 'There's something stronger than the police and that's the press.' So now I am a journalist!"

"A journalist! You're a jackass. I liked you better when you were a goat! You don't know what mischief you have done; you have done your work so well that to-morrow I shall not be here to protect you."

"I'll be here! Yes, I'll be right here, chief, with the press.

Chief, we are the stronger! I'll bring you victory—I'll bring you the Gory Puppet!"

M. Bessieres jumped up as though he had been galvanized into action.

"Lebouc," he cried, "if you could have done that—why then—"

"Well, then what, chief?"

"That's all we would need. Ah! We'd indeed be strong then!"

"Well, you can be happy, chief—he's here!"

"Here! Where?"

"He's right here, held down by a half dozen policemen at the bottom of an automobile, outside the Prefecture."

"Go and fetch him! Go and fetch him at once, Lebouc."

"I'll have him brought here," said Lebouc significantly.

The inspector was absent some moments giving orders, while the Chief of the Sûreté Générale strode his office in a state of extreme excitement. The Puppet meant salvation. With the Puppet he held the world! He would become master of the situation! That damned Lebouc! All the same they had ended by doing something. The Puppet was caught!

The chief of the service rubbed his hands gleefully.

Lebouc reëntered the office. "They are bringing him up," he said. "Have you telephoned down to the minister?"

"No, not yet; don't you understand that I want to see him first? But how did you manage to catch him? They say he is a formidable machine—terrible."

"Sure, he's terrible, chief, but then a jackass doesn't find anything terrible, does he—especially when he couples himself with a goat?" retorted Lebouc, taking his little revenge.

"But did you not arrest it by yourself—alone?"

"Yes, I did, all by myself, chief, and in the simplest way in the world. I was prowling round the walls of the Two Doves, when I saw a strange looking individual approaching. He seemed to be taking every precaution. He had a most peculiar way of lengthening his step—a sort of dancing step, and it was his queer gait that roused my curiosity.

"Suddenly he turned his head and I had a good view of his face. That mask has been described enough times, and it is true there didn't seem to be anything alive in it, but the eyes. Well, I'd been thinking of that Puppet for days and days. I had got the thing on my mind. And I had a hunch at once that this was he.

"'Good! He's come here to join his accomplices at the Two Doves,' I said to myself. And there flashed in my mind all that I'd heard about his extraordinary strength, and those two mechanical fists of his that strike at you like a catapult. So I said to myself: 'Now, this baby's got to be caught. I've got to stun him—demolish him with one blow —that'll knock him out. I'll make him cave in like a bundle of straw!'

"Before I entered the 'honorable police administration' I had been somewhat of a bad boy, and I can tell you, chief, I was known to them all for my straight arm blows. I could give him what we call in the profession a 'ram blow' or a Garibaldi pat, and that's some pat. Or I even thought for a moment that I'd give him a swelled pig's head (that's a thump in the face). But I stopped at the stomach. At one go I did the trick! And didn't I bulldog him, though!

"I was on him like a thunderbolt. My head went right in the middle of his mechanism. It seemed to sort of lift him off the ground. Then he fell over on his back, with his paws

up in the air! And then—and then—what happened then, chief, was funny.

"This particular thing, when he is on his back, is like a crab; he can't get himself up. He wriggled about, rolled from right to left, turned over on himself and shot out his fists, kicking enough to knock down the walls. But all I had to do was to get out of his way and hold his head down to the ground when he tried to raise it.

"I sent a boy who happened to be passing to fetch some ropes from the Green Tree Inn. He came back in an automobile that was there, and they brought Father Phillippe with them.

"We managed to pass the rope under the Puppet's arms, and then we dragged him like that, still on his back, as far as the machine.

"When the people down there saw that this mechanical thing, which had not stopped kicking, was the famous Puppet they wanted to get at him and smash his face.

" 'Hi, don't spoil him for me,' I said; 'he's mine!' And that's how we brought him to you, chief. He belongs now to the scientists and the law, and, 'pon my word, they can't say now that he doesn't exist. Listen! I can hear them dragging him! Here he comes!"

M. Bessieres himself opened the door and the agent dragged a huge automaton into the middle of his office. He was on his back, tied and bound, fettered with handcuffs. His big eyes were wide open and seemed to send out fire and flame.

They all stared at him in silence. They leaned over the phenomenon, not daring to touch it.

The Catastrophe

For some moments M. Bessieres looked at this exceptional sight, his heart pounding; then he hurried to the telephone and, taking down the receiver, asked to be connected with the minister's private office.

"Hello! Hello!" he cried. "That you, M. Tristan? I want to have a word with the minister. What do you say? They are having a conference. Yes, but listen, I've arrested the Puppet! The Gory Puppet! Yes! It's here in my office. What do you say? That's worth while! Well, I should say so! Go and get the Premier; I'll hold the wire!"

He waited some minutes. Then the office door was opened and the head of the Cabinet hurried in.

"The minister is coming up," he said with subdued excitement. "He wants to see it himself. Good Heavens—is that it? But you can't leave it on the floor like that! The Premier is going to question him. Lift him up a bit!"

"He's very dangerous," came the gruff voice of Lebouc, who was not at all pleased that his name had not yet been mentioned in the conversation thus far.

"Dangerous! He's just a funny automatic man tied up like an Arles sausage. There are ten of us here, and yet you're afraid!"

"It's not that I'm afraid," declared Lebouc in a voice still more churlish, "but let me tell you—"

"That's enough—keep quiet, Lebouc," ordered M. Bessieres. "It is quite right. The prisoner cannot appear before the minister in this ridiculous position. At least untie his legs and raise him up."

"Oh, fo-oo-rm, fo-oo-rm," sneered Lebouc, who was getting more and more annoyed. "Just for fo-oo-rm!"

Meanwhile, in obedience to their chief's orders, the agents had quickly untied the Puppet's legs and stood him up.

But Gabriel had no sooner recovered his equilibrium—no sooner had the soles of his feet touched the floor than, like Antaeus, the giant, whose strength returned each time that he escaped from Hercules's arms—the automaton, employing his great strength, snapped the bonds which still fettered him and literally bounded through the door, which offered no more resistance than a piece of cardboard.

He swept over the body of the minister, who at this moment was hurrying up to see the phenomenon, shook off the group of agents who were desperately clinging to him, and darted, as swift as an arrow, down the corridor on the left. He threw himself into the groove of a straight staircase as one would hurl himself into a chasm, and like a waterspout, burst into the deserted offices of the head clerk and through into the special cabinet of the Premier, where all the ministers, having been informed by the Premier of the great event, were waiting in a state of excitement to get further news of the Puppet.

Well—the Puppet brought news of himself, giving them a frightful jostling and striking terror in their hearts. Then, as he went through the hall where the "press" was waiting, some reporters, when they caught sight of this

automatic tornado, cleared the vestibule with one bound. He next went dashing into the courtyard and sprang into the chauffeur's seat of the minister's private car, which was in readiness to start.

Before any one had time to oppose this audacious move on the part of the automaton, the automobile went through the large iron gates and was saluted by the uniformed porter, who again closed the portals behind it.

The car went at full speed up the Rue Saint Honore without stopping, as it frequently did, before the Élysée —the home of the French President.

Then at this moment, coming from the Ministry and the Prefecture, a mad pursuit broke out after the Puppet. Bicycles and motor cycles and all the taxicabs that the police could requisition among those that were passing or were stationed in the neighborhood, took up the trail.

It was also at this moment that three very solemn gentlemen got out of a taxicab that pulled up before the iron gates of the Ministry and addressed themselves to the porter, who seemed reluctant to allow them to pass.

"But we wish to see the minister," said the spokesman, who was none other than Prof. Ditte, Dean of the School of Medicine.

"But, gentleman, that is absolutely impossible for the moment," replied the concierge; "the minister can receive no one. Besides, they are holding a conference at this very moment, so the usher says who brought me the message."

"But we are delegates from the Academy of Science, come to examine the Gory Puppet," protested Prof. Ditte. "The news that it had just been arrested was sent to us by the Premier himself, and from all the excitement in the neighborhood, I should imagine that it is correct."

"*Monsieur,* the news was correct a moment ago, but it is no longer correct. The Gory Puppet has just left here. Alas, it was I myself who threw open the iron gates for it to pass."

"The Puppet has left here?"

"Yes, gentlemen, in the minister's own automobile. I could not have foreseen that, could I?"

"Gentlemen," said the dean, turning to his colleagues, "I believe they are making fun of us—let us return to the institute."

While the three martyrs of science returned to their august domains on foot, for they were unable to find their taxi again, the chase after Gabriel continued.

At the corner of the Rue St. Honore and the Rue Boisey d'Anglais the intersection was congested. Gabriel profited by this to run squarely onto the pavement, amidst the shouts and shrieks of the pedestrians, who crushed one another against the walls.

Then on it went in the direction of Madeleine, making crooked turns with lightning speed, until it reached the Madeleine Bastille autobus, which was stationed at the head of the line ready to start. One of the buses was shaken in its base and badly damaged. The minister's automobile emerged from this collision a complete wreck, and as for the Puppet, it was making for another autobus which the driver was about to start.

The dozen travelers who were already in the bus saw with terror this species of human mechanism, which no shock seemed to affect, spring up into the driver's place and throw the man out like a rag onto the pavement.

The onrush of the pursuers was already there—madly

they came—and the shouts of "The Puppet! The Puppet!" could be heard on all sides.

It was a general scramble; every man for himself. At the risk of breaking their limbs the travelers jumped from the bus, which, fortunately, had only commenced to start. Yet, on the rear platform there was an old gentleman with white hair who could not make up his mind to get off the bus while it was moving. He began to cry like a child, while he waved his umbrella like a black flag.

The conductor had not the time to jump on again, so the old gentleman found himself alone with the Puppet, toward whom he turned again and again each time with another attack of pathetic weeping.

At the corner of the Faubourg-Montmartre there was such a mass of vehicles that for some seconds the autobus remained as though suspended. Was it going to fall over, or would it recover its balance?

It regained its equilibrium, but a policeman on a motorcycle had bravely dashed up to the car. He was now even with the Puppet and facing him. Leveling his revolver, he fired straight through the Puppet's body.

The shot produced no more effect upon Gabriel, apparently, than if he had been refreshed with a vaporizer. Yet all the bullets were not lost. One of them, after having traversed Gabriel's body, went the whole length of the autobus and penetrated the despairing old man with the white beard, who, staggering with the impact, rolled off the car to the ground.

This was what saved him.

If it had not been for this, he could not have escaped the final catastrophe which was approaching. Now at least there was every hope that with the care of a devoted wife

and loving daughter, that he would get on his feet again.

The redoubtable vehicle—this bomb on wheels, it has since been called—left the Rue Lafayette near the East Railway Station, went down the Boulevard Magenta, swept the square of the Republic and continued its mad course as far as the Bastille, then up the Boulevard Diderot. It was here that the catastrophe took place.

At the corner of the boulevards there is one of those *magnificent* apartment houses, which since the war the architects have erected on all sides for our admiration.

This type of house goes up with astonishing rapidity; the walls have the thickness of two bricks plastered together with a little cement. They are far less fitted out than we are led to believe. They stand as high as each other and are ornately beautiful, for they allow of charming plaster ornaments which one could not expect to have in stone, on account of the labor, only one must admit that they are not so durable.

An autobus like the one Gabriel was driving, launched with a master hand into such a *chef-d'oeuvre,* after a magnificent lurch in which it seemed to make a final spurt, could make a pretty mess of it—and did.

At first there was a crash like a clap of thunder. Then there was a thick cloud which spread out over the whole neighborhood. When the cloud had disappeared, there was no more house, nothing but a heap of shapeless material—an enormous cake of whipped plaster, in the midst of which they searched for the Puppet—but he was not to be found.

CHAPTER XL

A Greater Miracle

As NIGHT was falling on the day following these terrible events, a man, still young, who did not seem to be in very good health—at any rate, he had a very bad cold in the head—made his appearance at the Green Tree Inn and asked for the keys of the property of the Two Doves. This property, which he wished to visit, was for sale, he said he had understood, from the sign which he had seen on the gate.

Mother Mouche handed the young man with the cold in his head, the keys, and he went off, followed by the gaze of a man who was seated at a table in the barroom, and who up till then had been deeply interested in reading the *Epoch*, on the first page of which there seemed to be all the news.

We will cite the headlines:

THE GORY PUPPET CRUSHED UNDER THE DEBRIS OF AN APARTMENT HOUSE IN PROCESS OF BEING BUILT

M. BESSIERES, CHIEF OF THE SURETE GENERALE, SENDS IN HIS RESIGNATION

We will now give the principal passages of the articles which appeared under these flaming headings:

At last we are rid of the Puppet. Also of M. Bessieres, who, in all this extraordinary affair, has shown himself singularly deficient in the handling of his task. We can scarcely say which astonishes us the most—his inefficiency or his utter unconsciousness of this lack of ability.

Before he arrested the Puppet he terrified the public with dreadful stories about it—then, he no sooner lays hands on him than he lets him escape!

But all this is nothing compared with certain rumors of which we ourselves were almost the victims, and which might have had the most serious repercussions on our relations with certain foreign powers.

The articles which appeared in these pages signed "XXX" are still fresh in the minds of the public. We had every reason to believe that the subject matter of these articles had been taken from the most authentic sources, and when we gave the strength of our publicity to these disclosures, we quite thought that we were rendering a service to our country which could not be disputed.

These articles were brought to us as a matter of fact by a special agent of the chief of the Sûreté Générale, who gave us to understand that in publishing them we should be doing a great favor to the minister.

This agent, a certain M. Lebouc—M. Bessieres' *alter ego*—was the writer of these articles! He was not only the writer, he was also the instigator! All the story of the *Assouras* of Corbillieres, these adventures of Thugs, in which the highest names of Europe were compromised, *were invented by M. Lebouc*, urged on by whom? By what? To serve whose interests? To harm whom? We have just been informed—we shall say no more! This affair, also that of the Gory Puppet, must be buried.

Enough said concerning Corbillieres; what say you, Lebouc? This is not your first endeavor, it appears. You have already been broken in under circumstances almost identical—we mean—

where public interest was at stake. This Lebouc has always acted *against* public interest!

This small personage has a past. Let us hope that he will not force us to bring it to light. It is better for him to make himself scarce—disappear, as did the one who employed him, and who *sent him to us*.

Let this serve us for a lesson. No more Bessieres and no more Leboucs in the Sûreté Générale. It is an entirely new program to which we hold out our hand.

(Signed) THE EDITOR.

The young man with the cold in his head and who had been so very sad, returned at the end of an hour. His cold was not worse—that would have impossible—but he was much sadder.

He asked for a grog and returned the keys to Mother Mouche. When he was served and the landlady had left him, the man sitting in the corner, wearing glasses, came over to him and pushed the newspaper under his nose, saying:

"Have you read that, *monsieur?*"

"Yes," said the sad young man, "I've read it."

And he pushed the paper aside, as though he wished to cut short all conversation.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said the stranger; "I am Lebouc, late of the Sûreté Générale. I have been on the service for a number of years, but I have always been the one to be sacrificed. That is why they call me the 'Goat,' 'the Emissary Goat.' Now, in this last affair I intended to take my precautions. I turned to the Press, and now—the Press also has sacrificed me—the same as the police! Yes, I am more of a goat than ever! And you, you are M.

Jacques Cotentin, surgeon at the Faculty of Medicine and the inventor of the Puppet.

"Oh, you can rest assured, *monsieur*, I have no wish to cause you any annoyance. I don't want to cause trouble for any one, but as this opportunity presented itself, I have just stepped over to say to you that every line that I wrote in the *Epoch* was absolutely true! All the crimes that were committed at Corbillieres were committed at the abode called the Two Doves.

"The Gory Puppet—I have had this proof in the last twenty-four hours—had nothing to do with them! Benedict Masson was innocent! The last victim of the Assouras and of the marquis was a young lady who is very dear to you.

"I was a fool! I arrested your Gabriel at the moment when I should have given him aid. That Society kidnaped Mlle. Christine Norbert and she was given over to the Vampires!

"I am telling you everything. I am keeping nothing back, for this is the last time that I shall speak of these things. It is for you to profit by this—my last bit of gossip. If it will help you, I'll tell you that I do not think for a moment that your Gabriel was killed in the Boulevard Diderot, when the apartment house crashed down. They would show his remains—the pieces of him—if it were so.

"You will have to act with every precaution both on this side, and on the side of Mlle. Norbert, if there is still time to save her.

"As for me, I throw up the game. These fellows are too much for me. Yes, they are too much for me! They have had all on their side. You have seen the Villa? You have

visited the Two Doves? A sumptuous and respectable country house, is it not? Could you dream of anything more authentically good style? Why, they would come down here and laugh at the thought of the articles that 'XXX' had written! Oh, the scoundrels, they have taken every precaution, they have left nothing behind.

"As for that marquis—I won't mention his name—what an honest man—the victim of an absurd legend—represented as presiding over the orgies of the Two Doves, while all the time he was weeping for the wife he had lost and for whom he had just had erected a magnificent tomb in the vault of his ancestors. The tomb is to be inaugurated to-morrow, if I am not mistaken."

"M. Lebouc," said the young man, who had become much less sad, but more sombre, "what would you say if I make this infamous marquis confess publicly to all his crimes? If I force him to tell where he has hidden Christine Norbert? If, in a word, I show up the truth, and in such a stupendous way that there would be no power in the world that would stifle it this time?"

"*Monsieur,* I would tell you that you have accomplished a greater miracle than that which made you give life to the Puppet!"

"Well, then, M. Lebouc, follow me."

"Where are we going?"

"To Coulteray."

CHAPTER XLI

On the Stroke of Midnight

"You get down at the Fairy Grotto Hotel, Lebouc," said Jacques Cotentin as he took leave of the detective at Tours, "and don't you bother yourself about me—you don't know me. I have to keep out of sight, for if the marquis sees me, or even learns that I am in the neighborhood, he'll at once think that I've come to force him to give up Mlle. Norbert and that I intend to do something desperate to him. Then—he will disappear."

Lebouc went on and arrived at Coulteray at about seven o'clock in the evening. The inauguration of the tomb was to take place on the following morning.

At the inn old Achard was hopping around. All the countryside was again roused. The latest news from Paris had reached Coulteray. The earlier newspapers in which the marquis was especially aimed at, had actually been distributed. The stories of Vampires and Thugs from India had impressed the most peace-loving.

They recalled how the Laird of Coulteray had returned to Europe to settle in his ancestral home, bringing with him the strangest of servants. But now this last time he had arrived alone with a new valet. He had dispensed with the services of Sangor and Shing-shing. Every one approved of that step.

Yet the mayor and the curate still stood up for him; and

Dr. Noricet merely shrugged his shoulders when they told him of all that was being said in the neighborhood. The center of all this movement was Father Achard's inn.

There were three of them there—Achard, Verdeil, and Bridaille—who could not get "out of their heads" what they had seen and heard. People came from afar to hear them tell their story and many were the tankards that were emptied.

Nicoll, the grocer, and Tamisier, the wholesale wine merchant, much regretted that they had not been there when the ghost had spoken, but they had not forgotten, as one can well imagine, the time when the Gerard woman had given such a scream and they dashed right out at the very moment when the marchioness turned to go back to the cemetery.

On this particular evening widow Gerard, who was now Mme. Druine—as she had married the sexton—had arrived with her new husband at Coulteray. The couple had put up at the Fairy Grotto Inn. That tells you whether there was much talk going on in the barroom.

Druine still retained his taciturn demeanor; marriage had not greatly changed him. He was still the same rustic with the shock of hair, thick-set body and bent shoulders; but under this rough exterior the late sexton hid a loyal and honest soul, which was reflected by his eyes of marine blue—his clear regard held the sweet look of a boy chorister. One hardly knew what to think of him; perhaps he knew nothing much himself. He affected extreme prudence; simply shaking his head to the most subversive utterances.

It was strange. His wife seemed to make fun of him. She seemed to want to tease him.

"What's the matter with you, Druine?" she said. "Haven't you got a right to say what you think?" Then, turning to the others, she said:

"Why, he saw her on the first night!"

Finally Druine said:

"Now, Adolphine, shut up—you leave me alone!"

And Adolphine, well, she had her revenge. She had not forgotten how she had been chased by the Vampire, before all the village, at the time of the funeral ceremony. She did not spare the marquis, not she! It was she who incited Bridaille, Verdeil and Achard to repeat their stories to all newcomers.

The bowls of punch and the wine warmed the hearts and the imagination. Bridaille, the blacksmith, tapped on the table as on an anvil.

"We are not children," he said. "There's Verdeil—he's with his machinery all day long, and he's not the sort to be taken in with something that doesn't exist. This is no old wives' tale. With my hand on my forge I swear that she spoke to us. *She asked us to show her the way to her tomb!*"

As the man spoke these words the door of the barroom was suddenly pushed open and a man entered. His personality was overpowering—his appearance commanded instantaneous silence.

Lebouc, sitting in his corner, felt instinctively that he was now in the presence of the marquis.

The marquis was in a towering rage. His red face was flushed to a brickish hue. His eyes threw out a baleful glance. Never had he appeared so apoplectic. His right hand fingered the dog's whip, the coarse thongs curling round his top boots as he nervously lashed them.

"Good evening, all you!" he growled, sitting down near the fireplace. "I have just dropped in as I was passing by—just to listen to Bridaille's idiotic talk. I seem to have come at the right moment."

"Just so!" returned Bridaille, unabashed. "But I'm not the only idiot here. Here's Achard, Verdeil, Tamisier, and Nicoll without counting Druine and his wife, Adolphine. We're a good collection of idiots, eh?"

"So," cried the marquis in surprise, "you have come back then, Druine?"

"Yes, *monsieur le marquis,*" stammered Druine, turning very red, "I didn't want to let a ceremony like this go by without presenting you my respects—my sympathy."

"Oh, yes," said the marquis, sarcastically. "Well then, I see that everybody will be here. And all I hope is that after this is all over, imbeciles will leave me and the memory of the marchioness in peace."

He continued to lash his boots with his whip. Verdeil—who kept the garage at the corner of the bridge—got up and took his stand before the marquis, defiantly.

"I forbid you to call me an imbecile," he said, coolly.

"So, so," sneered the marquis. "Here is a gentleman with a mind of his own. A gentleman who never goes to church, who believes in nothing—nothing but ghosts!"

"Just so," retorted Verdeil, "I only believe in what I see and what I hear. Well, I have seen and I have heard, and I have recognized—the wife of the *empouse!*"

At the last word the marquis sprang up with an oath. He had turned quite pale. He seemed as though he were about to use his whip on Verdeil. He restrained himself, however.

"You are a lot of ignorant fellows," he cried. "You do

not deserve such a good master as I have been to you. You are more ignorant than the worst savages. You have seen me with the marchioness. During my absence, in order to pacify your ridiculous, ignorant minds, they opened her tomb and they showed her to you! Since that day no one has been down into the crypt. To-morrow morning you will see her, and they will seal the slab, once for all, over the unfortunate lady whom I have never ceased to mourn. You—you talk to me of an *empouse!* You pack of low down rascals!"

At this insult every man was on his feet, in a tumult which augured nothing good for the marquis. Bridaille had already pushed aside the table in front of him and had reached the marquis in the midst of the clatter of broken glasses and china.

The landlord was only just in time to interfere.

"Wait!" he cried. "What does it prove, if you do show her to us to-morrow morning? It's at night that she comes out of her tomb—on the stroke of midnight! You've known the truth on that matter longer than we have, so don't pretend you don't know."

The marquis gave him a sinister look.

"Well," he said, "I'll postpone the ceremony until to-morrow night—at midnight. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," replied Achard.

"And we are in the twentieth century," flung the marquis, cracking his whip viciously.

He went off in a greater rage than ever. When he was already far down the road they could still hear him swearing and cursing.

CHAPTER XLII

The Phantom Appears

WHEN it was learned in Coulteray and the surrounding neighborhood the next morning that the ceremony was put off until midnight, as a result of a scene at the inn, the excitement aroused the whole countryside. What a day they passed—and in what expectation!

Toward evening the marquis closed himself up in the chateau with the curate and the mayor, who were doing their best to console him. But he was in an unusual state of exaltation. This scandal that had burst out on the first magistrate of the county, through the idiocy of those dependent on him, so flustered him that he declared that he would not stand at the next election. He would shake off the dust of this absurd country and leave it to its shameless superstitions.

At the word superstition, the marquis, who had worked off his feelings on the mayor somewhat, now turned to the curate and berated him. "Yes," he said, "if there were less stories of saints and miracles and opened tombs, ghosts, and other nonsense—all these confounded legends—you would not see the entire population of a county of healthy people —where there is ground and sun for every one—rush out to see if an *empouse* was still in the tomb, or was coming out of it!"

He—he believed in nothing—nothing—nothing!

The priest, making the sign of the cross, begged him to be silent, if he did not wish the wrath of God to fall on him. The marquis saw that if he continued that kind of talk the priest would go away, and he would certainly take the mayor with him. He did not wish to remain alone—not that he was afraid—he was afraid of nothing—but at least the mayor and the curate represented the intelligent element of the countryside, and if this element failed him, what would he have left?

And he also had to take into consideration that with these stupid peasants one could never be sure what might not happen.

He sent for some bottles, but the curate would touch nothing. The marquis himself emptied three. At eleven o'clock in the evening he began to grow tender to the memory of the marchioness, whom he had loved so much.

"May she forgive me if I have caused her sorrow, and may she rest in peace in her new tomb," he said.

Thereupon he began to boast about the architecture and the sculptural motifs. The tomb had cost a great deal, but he had always thought that nothing was too good for Anne Elizabeth.

A subdued dull noise was heard around the chateau. The cemetery and the bailiwick were already filled with people, in spite of the cold, which was intense.

The night was beautiful. A great pale moon slipped from behind the silver clouds.

They all three set out for the chapel. They were recognized and way was made for them. All murmuring ceased as the marquis passed by. They were waiting, and more than one shivered for the reason of this waiting!

Everything was in readiness for the ceremony. The vicar

had prepared all, but they were not to open the crypt until the last moment. They crowded against the door; the women, especially, were eager, so great was their desire to see. There were some who had been standing there for hours.

Lebouc was one of the first to slip into the crypt. He had the air of being preoccupied. He took no notice of Jacques. Certain groups who had made a mistake as to the length of time that they might have to wait were emptying bottles which they had brought with them. They tried to crack some jokes, but they were not received well.

"Be silent, pagans," cried the crowd.

In the crypt all was silent.

They had erected a little altar at the end, on the tomb of Francois III—Iron Arm, who had died in the Holy Land. It was there that the curate would hold the service.

The people crushed together on the steps which connected the crypt with the choir, and also on the narrow steps of the little tower which led up direct from the cemetery.

The new tomb, which was in the Renaissance style, which had now replaced the flamboyant Gothic, was greatly admired on account of the four little dainty angels which decorated the corners.

The tomb was open, waiting until they brought the casket of Anne Elizabeth, which was still sealed up with the slab of the tomb of Louis-Jean-Chrysostome.

When the rite was accomplished and the moment had come for the workmen to dislodge the stone and slide it aside every one held his breath.

At the moment the bell in the tower struck the twelve strokes of midnight the stone was entirely pushed back.

Then a long lugubrious moan passed over the spectators. The tomb had well preserved the casket that had been confided to it, but the casket was empty.

The *empouse* whom all had been able to see at the time of the last ceremony, lying stretched out on her last resting place, was gone. All eyes were turned to the marquis. The women fell on their knees and the most menacing sounds began to be heard around him.

He had drawn himself up, haggard, anxious, but formidable still. Then suddenly another noise, which came from the cemetery, announced that something extraordinary was taking place there. And then there were terrible shrieks on the steps leading to the tower. Those who were there flew like owl nestlings, some of them rolled down to the bottom of the steps, as far as the crypt—and behind them—behind their gestures of terror, a long white form appeared.

Quite straight as though she had glided onto the earth, and the same as she had been when she haunted the nights of Coulteray, she came—Anne Elizabeth, Marchioness of Coulteray. She came toward the marquis, who with arms outstretched, face bloodless, mouth open, but incapable of uttering a sound, was recoiling slowly.

And when he could recoil no further he fell in a heap on his knees.

The phantom had stretched out her arms and, in a voice from beyond the tomb, said:

"I accuse you."

But the marquis had crumpled up on the stone floor, his head resounding dully on the slab of the tomb. He gave a dreadful sigh, a sort of death rattle, a gasp which was followed by a choking sound still more frightful.

A man rushed to the dying marquis and raised his head.

"Before you die, tell us what you have done with Christine!" he cried.

But, alas, Jacques Cotentin had only a lifeless body in his arms, close to which fell, at the same time, the frail form of the exhausted marchioness.

They were both dead. Dr. Noricet, who had closely followed Jacques, stated and declared this time it was indeed the end.

But his words could not satisfy this superstitious crowd, whose minds had been wrought up to the highest pitch by the tragic scene. Then, as the mayor and the curate gave their opinion that the marquis and the marchioness should be at once placed in their respective tombs, there suddenly took place one of those events which could only occur when the soul of a crowd is carried away, in spite of itself, as it were, in a fatal *tourbillon,* wherein it accomplishes some decisive act, for which no person in particular could be held responsible.

We must not forget, to the great majority of these superstitious peasants this was indeed the *empouse* coming from her tomb to seek her executioner on this side of death. To satisfy these ignorant minds the country must be delivered of this nightmare once and for all. It had lasted for months. There were too many phantoms in the nights of Coulteray.

What was it that tradition said against Vampires? What did it prescribe? That they should be burned!

Without even concerting the matter, without a word having been spoken, only the necessary gestures being made, black figures in the silver night went to and fro,

and soon an enormous pyre was erected in the middle of the bailiwick.

All the wood that they could find round about that could be burned was got together as if by magic. Cans of gasoline that Verdeil brought himself from his garage, were poured on the wood that the winter had dried.

The mayor and the curate had fled.

Soon the flames soared up and the old château stood forth as in the far-off times in the history of France on a day of massacre and fire. At last there was nothing more than a little friendly flicker like the fire of Saint Jean, the appeased souvenir of the cruel druidical flame.

CHAPTER XLIII

Word from Christine

JACQUES COTENTIN and Lebouc returned together as far as Tours. Jacques seemed to be greatly depressed. But Lebouc, for some time previous, had become too philosophical to let this fresh shock disturb his equanimity.

"We have no luck!" was all he said.

"Yes, it's rough on us," said Jacques; "if the marquis had only lived another few minutes we could have got out of him all we wanted. Sheer terror would have forced him to confess everything. Death snatched him from us at the very moment when he was about to speak! This man who believed in nothing, suddenly saw the ghost of his wife. The poor marchioness, her sufferings are over now, she is dead. There will be nothing to torment her any more."

In answer to Lebouc's question, the surgeon explained to him how Anne Elizabeth, whom they had once thought dead, had only been in a cataleptic trance, in which auto-suggestion had counted for a great deal. There have been countless cases of people who believed themselves dead, especially among those whose brains, already too weak, are agitated with the question of the hereafter. Anne Elizabeth *thought* herself dead, she fell in a trance, to wake up at night, at the hour when she knew that she ought to come from her tomb, like all vampires constrained by an irresistible destiny.

On the first night—the first time—Jacques had followed this ghostly form after the obsequies.

He had watched her go back to the crypt, replace herself on her funeral couch. She had seen him and looked at him with a sad smile and said to him in her far off voice:

"To-morrow at midnight!"

And then again she had fallen into the trance.

How could she have got out of her tomb all alone? Jacques had asked himself that—and he was led to the belief that Sangor had come to *carry out his terrible task*—and that she must have awakened at the very moment when Sangor opened the coffin and Sangor had fled from the crypt in mortal terror. That would explain the facility with which Druine, a few hours later, got rid of the Hindu, and who besides was laden with gifts.

Jacques had been very careful not to speak to Christine of what had really taken place in the crypt. His sweetheart's mind had been too upset for him to make any attempt, at this moment, to explain to her scientifically a phenomenon which it was easier to deny.

But now the unfortunate marchioness had to be saved. In order to get back her health she must first be got out of the clutches of the marquis, for he had been the cause of all the trouble.

So Jacques decided that he would have to show her in her tomb, as though dead, to all eyes.

In public, in view of all, the stone was sealed upon her.

On the following night he came to get her at the hour when she would be coming out of her trance. With the help of Dr. Noricet, whom he had taken into his confidence, and also Druine and widow Gerard, whom the two doctors finally made listen to reason, they carried the unfortunate

lady to an automobile which they had in readiness, and carried her off to a quiet spot in Sologne, where Druine had a little property.

There she had remained since. Dr. Noricet went to see her every week. There were times when he held out hopes of her recovery, then again he despaired of arriving at any results. The case had gone too far.

The idea of the vampire had, in the end, triumphed. Again she escaped at night to see her tomb.

On one occasion she had even walked miles through rough country roads to reach Coulteray. It was on the night when she had spoken to the people at the inn. Druine had had the greatest trouble to get her and bring her back. He was the "ghost" that had been following the "vampire!" She was now quite mad.

"So you understand now," concluded Jacques Cotentin, "why I got the idea that in making use of this living specter, to wring a confession from the marquis?"

"Yes," said Lebouc, "it was well thought out. Only in life, M. Cotentin, one must have luck on his side, and unfortunately we have no luck. Will you let me give you some advice, *monsieur*. Yes! Well, then, you do the same as I am about to do, disappear—let them forget you. Farewell, M. Cotentin."

"Farewell, M. Lebouc."

"The best way to be forgotten," said poor Jacques that evening on his return to Paris, "is to disappear forever, and I feel that if I don't find Christine that that is what will happen. There is nothing on earth that interests me now."

He gave no more thought to his Puppet except to curse it.

When he entered the shop in the Street of the Holy Sacrament, he was amazed at the state of disorder in which he found it. The corners were piled up with wheelwork, springs, cogged wheels all twisted and broken, only fit for the junk heap.

He recognized bits of the famous square wheels which had so intrigued the neighborhood and the remains of the famous system of Perpetual Movement which the inhabitants of the Isle of Saint Louis did not recall ever having seen wound up.

Old Norbert, in the midst of this havoc, was seated at his work bench, his magnifying glass in the arch of his eyebrow. Calmly, with slow and precise movements, he was repairing a drayman's large watch.

He did not seem at all astonished when his nephew appeared.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "Here's a telegram for you —it's been here some days. I did not know where to forward it. I have read it. It seems to be rather urgent."

Jacques snatched at the telegram. It was addressed to him. It came from Peira-Cava. It was signed "Christine." He read:

Come at once. We both need you.

He wanted to speak to the old man, but the latter told him to keep his mouth closed.

"I'm through," he said gruffly. "Arrange it yourself— that matter does not concern me."

CHAPTER XLIV

Passing of the Puppet

THAT same day Jacques started for the south. He reached Peira-Cava about four o'clock in the afternoon. As he got out of the car he noticed a young woman *in mourning* whose eyes were red. It was Christine.

"Oh, you have come too late, Jacques," she said, "he's dead!"

They walked down the little road leading to the woods, arm in arm. Christine was in the deepest state of distress. Jacques was unhappy, too, for it grieved him to think that Christine was taking the matter so seriously.

"Oh, Jacques," she wailed, "you will never know what Gabriel truly was nor what he might have become if he had wished to live. But he did not want to live. Some day I will tell you all about it—in detail—how I fell into the hands of the marquis and his friends, how I thought that all was over, and how Gabriel—dear Gabriel—surged in at the supreme moment—and snatched me from the arms of the Vampires.

"They all threw themselves upon him, but Gabriel alone was stronger than them all. They fired all the arms at him, but he paid no heed. One cannot kill the tempest! Then he passed through them and carried me off—he brought me here. But, alas! It was, after all, the end of him. Before he

came to save me, he had been almost crushed in a terrible accident.

"All his nervous system had been dreadfully injured. His breathing was difficult, And he did not want me to look after him. *He had thrown his little keys over a precipice,* that was before he threw himself over! He wanted to die, and die once for all! You will know why. So then I telegraphed for you, although he watched me every moment and had forbidden me to do so.

" 'I have only a few hours to live,' he said to me; 'do not let any one come here and disturb them.'

"Then one evening when his movements seemed slower and made with greater difficulty, he said good-by to me and made me swear not to follow him. I swore I would not, but all the same I did—I followed him at a distance. I was hoping that he would *stop altogether,* and then in spite of him I should be able to look after him. But he had got together all his strength, he was using *his last spring.* Oh, he led me ever so far into the snows, right on the road to Peira-Cava.

"Then suddenly he got up on the top of a mound and he seemed to be taking the sky and the earth as witnesses. He lifted his arms high for a moment, then dashed himself over the precipice.

"I ran like a madwoman! I had a long way to make the round, and I risked my life, but finally I reached him at the bottom of the precipice. I found his poor remains down there—smashed—I brought them away with me—you shall see them—oh, Jacques, your child was sublime! This is the greatest misfortune in the world!"

Jacques was quiet. He could make no reply to her. He was just sorry for himself.

"They thought here that it was an accident," continued Christine; "besides I arranged the matters so that they would think so. They went to look for the body, but a thaw had set in and they could find nothing. This seemed quite natural to them. They sympathized with the sister for having lost such a brother! The curate of Luceram came and said mass yesterday at our little chapel for the repose of his soul. *Dear Gabriel.* Nobody dreams that he is at the back of my wardrobe!"

Still Jacques said nothing. They had arrived at the châlet. There was a big wood fire in the grate.

"Come and warm yourself—you must be frozen," said Christine. "I am going to bring you a bowl of very hot broth and, alas, all the notes that he wrote to me. When you read them you will understand why he wanted to die. What a soul! Oh, what a soul! How he must have suffered."

She left the room.

A few minutes later she returned with a bowl of broth and a little box in which she kept all her precious notes.

"Read them," she said brokenly, "and I will come back presently." She went off sobbing.

Then Jacques looked after her with a queer look in his eyes and took from his inside pocket a large notebook in which he had set down from day to day all the records of the making of his automaton—all the minute and precise details relating to the sublime mechanism. Then without looking at them, he took the notes which Christine had handed to him and the notebook and flung them all in the fire.

When she returned, there was little left of her precious notes but some bits of charred papers. She understood at a

glance what had happened. She uttered a scream and dashed to the grate, where she literally thrust her hand into the glowing embers.

Here are some of the cherished lines that she was able to save from the disaster:

Yes, I am a Pure Spirit and I glory in it.

The play of the heart belongs still to the earth, but the winged thought is not weighted. I have loved with my heart, but not as the evil sons of men love.

I have not been able to love you with all that a man is—with all that I was when I walked the earth before in the form of Benedict Masson.

For a while I remembered the perfume of you, the sweetness of your hair—but I am forgetting those things. I can no longer remember—

This life cannot go on—your Jacques has imposed the most ferocious of tortures upon me. I know too well what life is as men live it who are men. No, no, I do not wish to live without your kiss. Adieu beloved.

Two years later they merely spoke of the Gory Puppet —that is, when they did speak of it—the epidemic of the sting, the pseudo-resurrection of Benedict Masson, the Thugs and their little trocar as a sort of nightmare which had swept over Paris at a time when minds had been entirely unbalanced—a malady which the state police had been fully aware of.

Jacques and Christine had married. The surgeon had established himself at Peira-Cava, taking his mother's name —De Beigneville.

Mme. de Beigneville had three beautiful children, and not one of them was named "Gabriel."

But Gabriel's remains still reposed at the bottom of her wardrobe. She did not wish to part with them, and Jacques had made no objection. He had handed over what was left of the genial automaton to her and the famous brain of Benedict Masson he had preserved apart in a glass jar. Sentiment would not be stifled.

Mme. de Beigneville was sweet and kind and the simplest of women. She had only one distraction outside of her children. Secretly she had worked on the task of repairing Gabriel. She never believed that it would be impossible to bring him back to consciousness. She had now got him into a condition that did her great credit. She had the serum functioning perfectly, the circulation was in order, the whole mechanism was perfect.

Then—one day when Jacques had gone out shooting with a party of friends and the lieutenant of the Alpines, who was in command of the station at Peira-Cava—she went to get the jar, in which the brain of the one whom she still called "dear Gabriel" was immersed.

What a shock was in store for her when she opened it!

The jar was empty! Jacques Cotentin had taken his precautions.

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